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PREPRIMARY EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN ONDO STATE, NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY

BY

EMMANUEL OLAIYA AINA

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

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THIS THESIS IS DEDICATED TO:

God, who is gracious and loving, by whose will the dream of my youth was achieved.

AND TO:

The fond memories of my loving and caring father, the late High Chief Abalura Aina, and my Aunt, the late Chief Dada Aina; their courage and perseverance in life remain the most precious virtues they bequeathed me.

ABSTRACT

Since the 1960's changes in social, political, and economic structures in Nigeria have stimulated the needs for, and growth of, diversified provisions of early childhood education. The policy which encourages private efforts in the provision of preprimary education, coupled with the recent upsurge of interest among parents, educators, scholars, and government in formal preschool provision opened the door to a "free-for all" of conflicting interests in the establishment and operation of preprimary schools in Nigeria.

This case study, qualitative in orientation and design; explored the aspirations, values, and beliefs of selected administrators, preschool teachers, and parents in a rural and an urban community regarding the present organization and administration of preprimary schools and possible incorporation of preprimary schools into the educational system in Ondo State, Nigeria. Two forms of interviews were employed to collect data in this study: focused interviews and casual or conversational interviews. Fourteen people and a group of traditional leaders were interviewed.

I used the 'thick description' of each participant's views as the starting points for exploring different views, and beliefs of the participants on the issue of preschool programs in Ondo State. As themes began to emerge from the participants' views, I focused on these in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the interviewees meanings. Through interpretations and reflections on the views, beliefs, and aspirations of the participants, as well as reading in related literature, twelve themes emerged. These themes could be summarized thus: the development of preschool education in Nigeria and in Ondo State; the incorporation of preschool education into public schools; the interviewees' views and beliefs about the importance of preprimary programs in Ondo State; problems of private preprimary institutions in Ondo State; advantages of privately operated preprimary schools; benefits of incorporating preprimary programs into the public

school system; the need to operate preprimary programs in the public schools; an appropriate/ideal preschool program for children in Ondo State; the need for privately and publicly operated preprimary programs; views about making preschool programs mandatory or available for all children; the roles of the government, community, and parents in preschool programs; and how to operate preschool programs in Ondo State.

The study concludes by drawing upon insights gained from the understanding of participants' views and my reflections on the nature of the study, the research approach used, and what the research has meant to me as a person and as a researcher.

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CHAPTER 1

An Overview of the Study

> And so I ask, who if not us will nurture our children? Who, if not us will protect them? And who if not us will assure them of their birthright? WHO? (Leon Chestang, 1974).

Background to the Problem

Since the 1960s, the changes in social, political, and economic structures in Nigeria have stimulated the need for, and growth of, diversified provisions of child care. Until 1960 when Nigeria gained her independence from Britain, preschool education was quite negligible and restricted to the children of the expatriates and a few affluent Nigerians. However, immediately after independence, two notable things happened which were to greatly influence the course of early childhood education in Nigeria. Firstly, there was an unprecedented rise in female education which had been at its lowest ebb in the 1940s, and with independence a large number of women flooded the labor market struggling for employment opportunities with male counterparts (Awoniyi, 1978). Secondly, there was the break down of child-rearing styles in the country, which disrupted the "multiple mothering" and extended family structure that had characterized Nigerian society in the past. These changes resulted in illegal nursery schools and day care centers mushrooming in the urban areas and a few rural areas, despite the fact that over 50% of the population lived in the rural areas (Awoniyi, 1978). In addition, most of these preschool institutions operated in garages, verandahs, sheds, sitting rooms, under the shade of trees, and so on (Awoniyi, 1988). Studies throughout Nigeria indicated that many of these programs had inadequate equipment, poor learning environments, unsanitary conditions, unqualified staff, overcrowded classrooms, and exorbitant fees.

Despite all these anomalies, parents have sent their children to these schools without considering the implications (Awoniyi, 1988). Today, numerous research studies (Kent, 1972; Spodek et al., 1991; Schweinhart, 1988) point out the potential that high quality

early childhood education can offer, especially for the disadvantaged children or children at risk of school failure. The increasing interest of the Nigerian government has brought about the need for alternatives in the organization and administration of preprimary education.

There was no clear national policy on preprimary education in Nigeria until 1977. Ownership of preschool institutions was restricted to educational institutions, big firms, and a few wealthy associations or individuals. Over the years, the organization and administration of Nigerian educational institutions have been changing in response to the needs of the people and the different policies of the various governments in power. The publication of the National Policy on Education released in 1977 and revised in 1981, identified four levels in the Nigerian education system: preprimary, primary, secondary, and post secondary levels.

For the first time, the government had a policy which enumerated the objectives for preprimary education and offered some implementation guidelines. The policy defines preprimary education as "the education given in educational institutions to children age three to five years plus, prior to their entering primary school" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981). The policy sets out the objectives of preprimary education thus:

1. Effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school.
2. Preparing the child for the primary level of education.
3. Providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work, on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc.
4. Inculcating social norms.
5. Inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature and local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities, etc.
6. Teaching cooperation and team spirit.
7. Teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colors, shapes, forms, etc. through play.
8. Teaching good habits, especially good health habits. (p.10)

The policy guidelines on implementation could be summarized thus:

In Ondo State, the Educational Law stipulates that once a private nursery/primary school is approved by the State Commissioner of Education, the school is automatically bound by the provisions of the Education Law, Cap. 36 or Laws of Ondo State of Nigeria, 1978. Therefore, it becomes the responsibility of the Area Education Officer to visit the school regularly for quality control purposes.

Unfortunately there are loopholes in the policy which many "private individuals" have taken advantage of to the detriment of the children (Awoniyi, 1988). Private efforts in the provision of preprimary education, coupled with the recent upsurge of interest among parents, educators, scholars, and government in formal preschool provision, opened the door to a "free-for all" of conflicting interests in the opening and operation of preprimary schools in Nigeria.

> Early childhood educators, psychologists, and many concerned intellectuals maintain that early childhood experiences and the first six years of life are vitally essential to a child's future progress. A child's growth requires intelligent care and trained guidance relative to his or her physical, mental, emotional, and social potentialities. Children who spend a good proportion of each day in the company of other children under the supervision of a trained teacher in a stimulating environment are said to learn to use their peers to meet their needs (Read, 1980).

To these ends, it is desirable that early childhood education be given more, and prompt, attention with regards to organization, administration, staffing, quality and quantity control, and most importantly, funding by the Ondo State government. Hitherto, the Ondo State government has provided no financial support at this level of education.

Preprimary Education in Ondo State, Nigeria

As a result of conflicting interests in the opening and running of preprimary schools in Ondo State, and other obstacles mentioned earlier, I based my Master's thesis (Aina, 1990) on the organization, administration, and achievement of some selected preprimary

schools in Ondo State in Nigeria. I was motivated to do this by an intense desire to find out what goes on in the large number of nursery institutions that exist in the state, which I did by comparing and contrasting nursery schools in the state which were managed by different proprietary agencies.

The intent of my investigation was to determine whether preprimary institutions adhere to the state government guidelines on establishment and the Federal Ministry of Education guidelines for nursery education. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, two sets of questionnaires were designed. One of the findings of the study showed that 70% of the teachers in the various schools were trained teachers (i.e. Grade Two Diploma and National Certificate of Education [N.C.E.]). These teachers were specially trained to teach at the elementary and high school levels, not at the preprimary level. Only 23% of the teachers had preschool education qualifications (i. e. Montessori Diploma, etc.).

Regarding teacher-pupil ratio, this varied from one school to another, even though the approved standard for the state nursery schools is one teacher to twenty five pupils. The findings of the study revealed that the teacher-pupil ratio was on the average one teacher to forty children. In addition, most of the classrooms had inadequate space and equipment. The study also revealed that inspection of preprimary schools was quite irregular, despite a regulation that says "it is the responsibility of the Area Education Officer to visit schools regularly for quality control purposes." Only 23% of the approved preschool institutions were inspected once a year, and these schools were located in the urban areas. Despite the fact that more than 50% of the population live in the rural areas, the provision of educational facilities at the preprimary level was, as a rule, inadequate and of poor quality compared to those in urban areas.

My conversations with parents, administrators and early childhood educators revealed that the quest for preschool education in Ondo State was very high. This was because more women were working outside their homes in an effort to meet the high cost of living. Even though the state government acknowledged the importance of preschool

education, the findings of the study showed that it had not given any financial assistance to preprimary education. Instead, the state government made privately owned schools pay heavily for their applications for approval, inspections, and the annual license renewals. However, the preschool institutions' proprietors disregarded the government directive on fees and charged considerably higher fees to the parents, which deprived children from poor homes the opportunity of access. The study revealed that 100% of the school revenue came from school fees. Thus only well-to-do parents could afford to send their children to nursery school. This is a perpetuation of elitism which negates the concepts of equity and accessibility of all children to early childhood education and which is contrary to a pledge made in the National Policy on Education which guarantees "equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at all levels" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, p. 7).

In conclusion, preschools have been effectively established and maintained in many countries. In Nigeria, however, the issue of preschool education is still somewhat confused, and further investigation is essential if programs are to be made an effective and universal reality for all Nigerian children during their critical early years.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case-study was threefold:

1. To explore the beliefs and views of selected school administrators about the development of early childhood education and its possible incorporation into the public school system in Ondo State, Nigeria.
2. To explore the aspirations, values, and beliefs of selected preschool teachers and parents in a rural and an urban community about the present organization and administration of preprimary schools and the possible incorporation of preprimary schools into the educational system in Ondo State, Nigeria.
3. To explore what these school administrators, preschool teachers, and parents see as some of the merits and the shortcomings of this possible incorporation.

The issues explored in this study focused on: 1) How preschool educational opportunities should be provided and the accessibility made equal ; and 2) How best to provide these opportunities.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study was that it provided evidence regarding the possibility of incorporating preschool institutions into the public school system and on how to effectively run programs so as to meet the needs of every child. Preprimary schools were founded on the belief that each child has the right to a fair start in life. This implies, as pointed out by Davis Dabney (cited in Gore et al, 1964), that "certain circumstances and opportunities are better than others for young children because they influence the child's thinking, behavior, and development" (p. 5). Most importantly, all children in Ondo State deserve access to quality education in their preschool year. Apparently, quality early learning experiences are as important to successful life-long learning as experiences which come later in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schooling.

For more than a decade now, many Nigerian educators and parents have been calling on Federal, State, and Local governments to take responsibility for preprimary education by incorporating it as part of the public school system. Their arguments are based on the premise that the experiences children have during the early years of their lives are crucial to their future attitudes to learning. Considering the present predicament of preprimary education in Ondo State, it is felt that some degree of control over the discrepancies, exploitation, perpetuation of elitism, and the experiences of every child during this critical period is essential. This study explored the views, values, beliefs, and aspirations of school administrators, preschool teachers and parents to determine how much emphasis should be placed on the incorporation of preschool education into the public school system. Because no research had been conducted in this area in Ondo State, it is timely and appropriate that an investigation of the development of early childhood education in Nigeria be conducted at this time. This study not only urges that attention be paid to usually more transcendent structural issues (i. e., poverty versus wealth, and rural and urban disparities), but calls for a rethinking of both the educational disadvantage of

poor children in the rural areas and the presumed educational advantage of rich parents in urban areas.

This case study would not only help to illuminate or challenge the present organization and administration of preschool education in Ondo State, but might alert parents, government, and educators to the urgent need to run preschool institutions more effectively. A case study of preprimary education programs in Ondo State is highly significant in documenting the case and in providing information that may inform public policy decision makers, because only the State Government has the power to provide preschool education equal across the state. Finally, it may persuade educational planners and policy makers at both state and federal levels of, and prompt greater consideration of, the nature and role of preschool education in Nigeria's educational system.

Definition of Terms

Education. This means any experience which contributes to the development of the whole child. Education, in this sense, is a shared responsibility of the home, school, church, and community (Alberta Education, 1984).

Equity education. Equity education is used here in relation to preprimary education. This implies the fair and equal treatment of all children who wish to participate in and enjoy the benefits of education. It is the structuring of educational priorities, commitments, and processes to reflect the reality of our diversity as a fact of life in Ondo State, Nigeria. This implies that preschool education should be made available on equal terms to all socio-economic classes (Desta, 1982, Rodriguez, 1987).

Preprimary education/preschool education. Preprimary education or preschool education refers to the education given in educational institutions to children age three to five and a half years, prior to their entering primary school (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981).

Compensatory education. Compensatory education implies that such education compensates or "makes up" for something that is lacking in a child's environment, which is needed to help that child realize his or her potential (Wright, 1983).

Privately operated nursery schools. Privately operated nursery schools offer programs to children age three to five and a half years by an individual, a group, a corporation, or an institution. They do not receive public funding directly from the government but rely on fees and contributions. As it is used in this study, they are run as businesses with the purpose of making money and providing their owners with a return or profit on their financial investment (Spodek et al., 1991).

Publicly operated nursery schools. Publicly operated nursery schools offer programs to children age three to five and a half years by governmental bodies, such as state or local government school boards, and are funded through public monies (Spodek et al., 1991).

Organization and administration. The concept of organization and administration in relation to preprimary education may be defined in this study as the totality of the processes through which appropriate human and material resources are made available and made effective with proper coordination for accomplishing the purposes of an enterprise: the "enterprise" of developing the whole child. It is the effective management of preschool institutions that will foster this development (Edem, 1982; Campbell, 1983).

Kindergarten. One of the institutions of early childhood education is kindergarten. The age of admission of children into kindergarten varies from country to country but, on the average, it ranges from four to six. For instance, in the Province of Alberta the required age is four and a half to five and a half years. Whereas in Nigeria, the required age is five to six years. It is a preparatory year before the formal grade one (Government of the Province of Alberta, 1982; Canadian Education Association, 1972).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitation

Assumptions of the study. This study was based on the assumption that the social world consists only as a set of multiple realities, therefore, this case study could reconstruct and describe these realities in relation to the views and aspirations of the respondents on how best to operate preschool programs in Ondo State. An additional assumption was that the relationship between the researcher and the respondent was connected, with each influencing the other, and thus this interactive process enhanced the researcher's ability to obtain data. Other assumptions relating to the research methodology are: a) that this qualitative case study would make it possible for me to identify and interview some of the people directly involved in decision making and in the provision of preschool education in Ondo State, Nigeria; b) that important documentation for the study would be available and accessible; and c) that the documents and the interviews would provide sufficient data to bring forth an adequate description and analysis of the values, beliefs, and aspirations of participants relating to the development of preschool education in Ondo State, and the likely advantages and disadvantages.

Limitations. The study was limited to the extent that data interpretation and conclusions depended on the accuracy of respondents' responses, how knowledgeable they were about the programs, and their willingness to give truthful information. The study was also limited by the interview technique I used to elicit the data which was based on the perspective of the participants and on document analysis. The representativeness of the views, values, beliefs, and aspirations of the administrators, teachers, and parents selected was another limitation. Moreover, since preprimary education started almost immediately after independence in 1960, some of the participants had difficulty remembering events surrounding its development in Nigeria. However, any information obtained from participants, whenever possible, was cross-referenced with data obtained from document analysis.

Delimitation. The research was delimited to a selected group of administrators within the Ondo State Ministry of Education (its Early Childhood Education Division's supervisors/inspectors), head teachers and coordinators, also preschool teachers, and parents in a rural and an urban community, some of whom were and/or are currently involved in the preprimary education services programs.

Organization of the study Chapter One has provided the context in which the study was conducted and why it was important for the researcher to explore the views, beliefs and aspirations of the people interviewed on the possibility of incorporating preschool programs into the educational system in Ondo State. Chapter Two reviews some of the studies that have looked at the issues of equity and access in preschool education, the importance of good preschool programs, and the development and operation of preschool programs in Alberta as well as in Ondo State. Chapter Three contains a description of the theoretical orientation of qualitative research design used in this study. Chapter Four, which primarily develops themes that seem essential in order to understand and to seek the meaning the interviewees gave to their beliefs, values, and aspirations on the provisions of preschool programs. Chapter Five contains and provides a summary of some reflections on the study.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Related Literature

> Education is a better safeguard of liberty than a standing army. (Motto of Silver Street Kindergarten Society, 1896).

Preschool Education: Can There be Equity in Access?

A research study is sterile, barren, and dormant unless it is related to other research studies. Borg (1989) asserts that "until you have learned what others have done and what remains to be done in your area you cannot develop a research project that will contribute to furthering knowledge in your field" (p. 5). Thus this chapter is aimed at examining related literature in this particular field of study.

Much of the history of elementary and preprimary programs in Nigeria before the declaration of universal and free primary education has been a chronicle of exploitation and deprivation of poor children by adults of other social classes. Glennerster (1979) affirms that "we live in a society characterized by substantial inequalities in income, status and power" (p. 44). He goes further to say that "these inequalities have proved resistant to change" (p. 44). Equality of educational opportunity at all levels is absolutely essential to the nation's commitment to excellence. It is crucial that preschool programs for rural areas and economically disadvantaged children continue to strive for the same level of excellence as other programs. Rodriquezz (1987) suggests that excellence and elitism are not synonymous, hence, he argues that we must open doors to create educational opportunities for a wide variety of children, and we must recognize the potential for excellence in diverse children. He claims, "Equality and quality are not mutually exclusive" (p. 44).

I chose not to examine the various theories and conceptions relating to equal opportunity, but will review the scope of equality of educational opportunity, the causes, and the five main National Objectives of Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education (1981). The case for educational opportunity according to Goodlad has

> revolved almost exclusively around the question of access to a school to be commonly attended and around discrimination based on color, race, or creed, but other considerations are now likely to expand the dimensions of the controversy. (in Rodriquez 1987, p. 43)

In their contribution to the concept of equality of educational opportunity, Coleman (1968) and his colleagues observed that the concept of equality of educational opportunity has had a varied past, and has continued to change radically in recent years. Increasing the equality of educational opportunity at all levels should not be seen in a narrow perspective. It should, however, fit into the search for greater social justice and, consequently, it should appeal to the educational system's social cultural roles. If education is considered to be a fundamental human right, irrespective of the socio-economic background of individuals, then equality of educational opportunity is a basic, inevitable condition of this right.

In order to comprehensively deal with this issue of educational opportunity, I examined Nduanya's (1980) notion of educational opportunity. He first examines 'opportunity' before plunging into 'equality of educational opportunity'. According to Nduanya, opportunity implies a "favorable or advantageous combination of circumstances" (p. 28), while he sees educational opportunity as a "favorable combination of educational circumstances whereby the individual is enabled to engage in a process of developing his [or her] capabilities through acquisition, formally or informally, of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values both for his [or her] own benefit and for the benefit of his [or her] society" (p. 28). Nduanya is of the opinion that 'equality' is a matter of fairness and, given the differences in the needs and capacities of every child, may involve unequal but inversely proportionate allocation of educational, or other, resources. Based on the quoted definition above, Nduanya specifies four dimensions of equal educational opportunity:

1. *Provision* of favorable educational circumstances.
2. *Accessibility* to the favorable circumstances created.
3. Actual *utilization* of the available and accessible circumstances.
4. The resultant *end product* of the entire process. (Nduanya, 1980, p.29)

Coleman (1968) informs us that the earliest meaning of educational opportunity in the United States included the following:

1. Providing *free* education up to a given level which constitutes the principal entry point to the labor force.
2. Providing a *common* curriculum for all children, regardless of background.
3. Partly by design and partly because of low population density, providing that children from diverse backgrounds attended the *same school*.
4. Providing equality within a given *locality*, since social taxes provided the source of support for schools. (p. 11)

In practice, if this concept of equality of educational opportunity is to be met, it means that the amount spent on a child's education should not depend on the wealth of the child's parents, but must be supported from the coffers of the State as a whole (Wesley, 1980).

Fleming (1974) conceptualizes the Canadian version of the concept of equal educational opportunity as:

a) The provision of facilities and programs of equal quality and variety for 'normal' individuals, regardless of differences in physical location or social and economic circumstances; and

b) The provision of special assistance to individuals with obvious intellectual, emotional, physical, or cultural needs so as to enable them to take advantage of educational opportunities.

Fleming observes the fact that society accepts the existing social inequality, however, there is a general conviction that schooling, irrespective of the levels, can and should be effective in reducing inequalities.

In the same vein, Cooper (1980, p. 68) says "educational opportunities may be ones for education, or ones provided by education." He observes that this is usually seen in the 'access' and 'provision' senses; he goes further to affirm that a version of the provision sense (or opportunity by education) is offered when "equality of educational opportunity, is equality of economic and social opportunity through education" (p. 68). To

this end, educational opportunities are understood as the social and economic prospects which education provides. Now that several research studies (Schweinhart et al., 1993; Schweinhart, 1988; Mitchell, 1988; Mckee, 1990) have identified various positive effects of both short and long term preschool education for the children, families, and society as a whole, equal educational opportunity should be addressed.

Similarly, Bhagwati (1985) sums up the concept of social equality, in the light of educational equality at all levels, as the "equalization of costs and benefits from any level of education" (pp. 178-179) for all social classes. "Costs" here include the relative opportunity costs of both the capital invested at every level of education and the child labor lost by having them attend school, the opportunity cost obviously being greater for poorer homes. As well, "benefits" would include economic and employment opportunities, together with checking the "rate of return" against the opportunity cost of capital originally invested. Here again, the poorer homes tend to be worse off (Bhagwati, 1985; Ugbor, 1991).

Up to this point, some striking operative words have emerged in the various concepts of equal educational opportunities discussed, such as: 'educational circumstances' or 'provision', 'possibility' or 'accessibility', 'fair treatment', 'progress' or 'success', and 'benefits' or 'results' or 'outcome'. All these essential components have been streamlined and operationalized in Nduanya's four-dimensional approach to the concept and scope of educational opportunities mentioned earlier. Significantly noted is the general endorsement in the literature of Nduanya's four-dimensional schema of equality of educational opportunity by Carron and Chau (1981); Husen (1975, 1987); Spaulding (1988); and Wyn and Wilson (1986). For instance, some of these scholars maintain that it is not simply a matter of admission to the first year; it is the probability of entering each of the succeeding cycles in an educational system, especially where there is neither compulsory education nor universal preprimary education. Carron and Chau (1981) observed that the actual rates of access for one group may be greater because of decisions

which will still have to be made by parents depending on the 'constraints' involved. Nduanya's four-dimensional schema are but heuristic aids which guided this study in relation to the equality of preschool educational opportunity for all children.

In further examination of the process of equality of educational opportunity, the Quebec Superior Council of Education (1981) mentions three objectives:

1) To ensure equal access;

2) To provide individuals and groups with educational services that will allow them to put their talents and their individual and collective resources to the best possible use, which is dependent on their aspirations and needs; and

3) To have recourse to various corrective measures in face of social inequality so that belonging to a group per se is not a cause for educational inequality. (p. 2)

This statement of principles further emphasizes a concern for social justice, a will to prepare every child for his or her social role, and the importance of ensuring the overall development of people and the society as a whole.

In addition, the Quebec Province's Statement of Principles also enumerates some components of equality of educational opportunity; in this case the issue of equality of education is addressed in a more holistic manner, and refers to the educational function as a whole and not only as a school. In this regard, school becomes a service that is an educational means and the community's resources must assume an educational function. Fleming (1974) maintains that schools are set up, among other things, to suppress some potentialities while privileging others. To this end, access to preschool institutions, and other levels of education, as well as to museums, libraries, and other institutions that promote the well being of individuals must be made easier. In other words, the entire society must be literate so as to enable all its members, irrespective of their age, class, or socio-economic status, to make use of the opportunities that are offered. Thus, equality of education embraces and encompasses the respect for individual differences, individual development, collective promotion of all social groups, diversity and competence, equal access to educational opportunity at all levels, diversified treatment adapted to the

educational needs of every child, and consequently equal results, which implies the guarantee of basic education to every one (Quebec Province, Superior Council of Education, 1981).

Three main factors of inequality in educational opportunity have been identified by the Quebec Province's Statement of Principles, which are individual, econo-socio-cultural, and academic. Boudon (1974) identifies stratification as the major cause of educational inequality. He affirms that:

> Stratification is the principal factor responsible for inequality of educational opportunity as well as for inequality of social opportunity, and that any lessening of the rigidity of stratification... for instance through a reduction of economic inequality...is probably more likely to affect the inequality of both educational and social opportunity than any other factor. (p. 193)

In many societies, even publicly-funded services are unequally distributed and access to services (preschool education, child care, etc.) depend on where a family lives. Similarly, disparities can occur in the regulation and support of private services, and some State and Federal Governments are reluctant to establish clear targets and workable guidelines. Blakemore and Cooksey (1981) offer familiar insight on the educational opportunity mainly in sub-Saharan Africa:

> Great wealth and great poverty exist side by side, and the gap between rich and poor is as wide as anywhere else in the world. Inequalities of wealth and power are reflected in educational inequalities although there is by no means a one-to-one relationship. In general, however, high levels of social inequality are accompanied by high levels of inequality within education system... In the final analysis, educational inequalities reflect economic and social inequalities between classes, regions, ethnic groups, and so on and these are extremely difficult to eliminate. (pp. 51, 57)

The causes of educational inequality could be seen in a broader perspective to include social, ethnic, regional, and so forth. In fact, the issue of regional provision of preschool education, either rural or urban, is one of the focuses of this study. Blakemore and Cooksey (1981) also identify the kinds of educational inequality in much of Africa, and maintain that "not all children have the same chance of going to school. This we call unequal *access* to schooling" (p. 52). In addition, material factors, such as the availability of funds from parents and other family members, the number of children in the family,

(because most Nigerian families are extremely large) and the number of books which a pupil possesses, will affect such things as the quality of school attended.

Okeem (1980) identifies five major obstacles in the achievement of equality and the equalization of educational opportunities in Nigeria. The first one is that of the conflicting ideologies (capitalism versus socialism) that exist in the country. The second obstacle has been attributed to the abrupt failure of politicians (military government, as the case may be) and policy makers to clarify or operationalize what they mean by "equalization of educational opportunities" and similar concepts. The third obstacle identified is the existence of a class society. Class-conditioned differentials in socialization methods make educability easier and school performance better for middle-class, but not for working-class children. The fourth obstacle is the unabated urban-rural discrepancies in the provision of infrastructural facilities, educational opportunities at all levels, and so on; these are issues that require prompt attention. The fifth constraint identified by Okeem is an attitudinal one, which is linked with a class society. Okeem concludes that equalization of educational opportunities cannot be achieved without a radical re-ordering of the social structure, its political ideology, and its socialization process.

It is crucial at this juncture to examine the main national objectives of Nigeria which formed the foundation upon which the National Policy on Education was built. The national objectives will be examined in relation to the concept of equality of educational opportunity as practiced in Nigeria. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981) states that:

> Since a national policy on education is [the] government's way of achieving that part of its national objectives that can be achieved using education as a tool, no policy on education can be formulated without first identifying the overall philosophy and objectives of the nation. The five main national objectives of Nigeria as stated in the second National Development Plan and endorsed as the necessary foundation for the National Policy on Education, are the building of:
> a) a free and democratic society;
> b) a just and egalitarian society;
> c) a united, strong and self-reliant nation;
> d) a great and dynamic economic; [economy] [and]
> e) a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens. (p. 7)

Nigeria's philosophy of education is built on 'equal educational opportunities' for all citizens of the nation. In addition, the revised constitution commits the Nigerian state to the principles of equality, democracy and social justice (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979, sections 14.1 and 17. 1). In regard to Nigeria's educational objectives, the said constitution states that the "Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels" (sec. 18. 1). For the first time, the policy acknowledges preschool education, enumerates the objectives and offers some implementation guidelines. The vague guidelines only encourage private efforts in the provision of preprimary education, which the privileged individuals have turned into an investment venture and which only the privileged children can afford. The consequence of which is that we now have expensive private preschool institutions and primary schools, together with exclusive university-run and top military preprimary/primary and secondary schools; and these abound all over Nigeria. There is no doubt that the lower income families which constitute over seventy percent of the population are liable to do less well in a system based mainly or wholly on private services, especially in the provision of preschool education. Presently, unprecedented unemployment, layoffs, meager wages, hunger and disease seem to have become second nature, particularly to the poorer sections of the population (Newswatch, July 24, 1989). It is apparent that under these circumstances, sending children to expensive private preschools is likely to be a luxury which the poor cannot afford. For instance, Diejomoh and Anusionwu (1981) report that,

> The advantage that higher income group children have over their counterparts from relatively lower income families appear to begin from their pre-secondary school preparation. The results of our analysis show that more than three quarters of the students in the first-rate schools attended preprimary nursery schools. The corresponding percentage for the second and third-rate schools are less than one-third and less than 10% respectively.... The first-rate schools administer an oral examination in addition to a written examination. Primary school pupils who have passed through the private schools have a better chance of passing both the written and oral examinations. The results of our analysis show that 67. 2% of the students in the first-rate schools went to private primary schools. Corresponding percentages for second and third-rate schools are 27. 5 and 5. 2 respectively. (pp. 391-393)

The above analysis corresponds to what operates in Nigerian society; it shows that there are few inequalities that are more intolerable than the inequality of educational opportunity. For all the rhetoric of "a just and egalitarian society", Nigeria still operates from a post-colonial capitalist, social philosophy. This is the reality. I would like to sum up this discussion with the statement of one cited in Rose (1976). This writer charged corrupt politicians with irresponsibility, especially those who filled their pockets with tax payer's money or who spent millions of dollars on a "speedway" to be used only by city officials, but who according provided no money

> to give our children sufficient room in the schools, to open kindergartens for those of tender age or to buy them fresh air, a plot of clean grass, a shade of tree or a flower. It seems cheaper to those who govern us to let them grow up in filth, ignorance and vice and to swell the population of juvenile prisons and reformatories. (p. 84)

Achieving true equality entails giving children an equal opportunity to participate in education. Needless to say, equality cannot be achieved through education alone; it also demands greater tolerance of differences within society at large.

A Case for "Good" Preschool Education

Since a review of the literature merits a study in itself, it was important and appropriate for the purposes of this study to examine the basic theoretical premises on which current preschool programs are rooted. In examining the rationale for a "good" preschool education program, some questions could be raised. What constitutes a "good" preschool education program? What are the crucial differences between high quality and low quality preschool education programs? What are the critical components of high quality preschool education programs? In looking at experimental research on preschool education programs to help answer these questions, Schweinhart (1988) asserts that such research does not answer them fully. He says that most of this research compares children who attended a program and children who did not. Such research can tell us how successful programs are but may not be able to pinpoint specifically which "program

elements are responsible for this success" (p. 14). Schweinhart conceptualizes the components of high quality early childhood programs thus:

a) A child development curriculum.

b) Low enrollment limits, with teaching/care-giving teams assigned to each group of children.

c) Staff trained in early childhood development.

d) Supervisory support and inservice training for a child development curriculum.

e) Involvement of parents as partners with programs staff.

f) Sensitivity to the non educational needs of the child and the family.

g) Developmentally appropriate evaluation procedures. (p.15)

Spodek (1973) speaks about material requirements in terms of kinds and quantities. Fundamental to any good nursery school program is the provision of adequate materials, toys, and tools which may not be provided at home. These materials will enhance the development of cognitive, physical, and social skills of the child, while the lack of these will make the child discover little in an arid environment (Yardley, 1976; Uyoata, 1985). Schweinhart's core components of high quality early childhood education programs are generally endorsed in modern literature (such as Mitchell, 1988; Mckee, 1990; Spodek et al., 1991) and were useful aids in this study. In examining the basic theoretical assumptions on the purposes and effects of a good preschool education program, I explored the opinions of Spodek (1973). He asserts that:

> At different times, the purposes for which early childhood education programs have been designed have varied. Even today programs for young children have different stated purposes. Sometimes these purposes are determined by the identified needs of the children for whom the program is designed. At other times, they result from social thought about all education. Early childhood education can be conceived as an extension of parental child rearing, or as a way of preparing children to fit into a social role. (p. 10)

The above assertion by Spodek aptly describes the many and varied rationales and or assumptions for which early childhood is considered important. This is also consonant with educational psychologists and sociologists who believe that sending children to a

preschool institution during their critical period of development has positive influences for learning in subsequent years (Mckee, 1990). The truth is that the teaching and learning which occur in the preschool classroom form the foundation for future success in school.

Soken (1983) rightly affirms that each child is unique and preschool education helps an individual to grow at his or her own rate. Awoniyi (1982), agreeing with Soken, states that scholars have proved the underlying motives of parents who patronize preschool institutions in Nigeria to include such things as meeting the physical, social, cognitive, and aesthetic needs of their children. Undoubtedly, the education of children begins in the home, where the foundations of learning and living are also laid and guidance continues as well. The importance and value of preschool education as stated by Gore et al. (1964) is that an effective preschool supplements and extends the foundations laid at home. These authors go further by asserting that "at the ages of 3, 4, and 5, children reach out for experiences with other children and adults, and for those opportunities to learn and develop which even the most privileged homes lack. These experiences are educative and conducive to growth because they take place in environments that invite learning and are under the leadership of a professional teacher" (p. 1).

Other studies (Mckee, 1990; Spodek et al., 1991) indicated that with an increase in preschool attendance, children were more sociable, constructive, and persistent in their activities, they engaged in less solitary play and chose friends with similar interests. Early childhood programs are often used to respond to social problems, but they also have pervasive and long-lasting educational effects. For instance, the consortium on longitudinal studies reports "persistence of preschool effects" (Lazar et al., 1982) and demonstrates that early intervention programs can provide significant long-term educational benefits to children. This is evident by the findings of their study:

a) Infant and preschool services improve the ability of low income children to meet the minimal requirements of the schools they enter. This effect can be manifested in either a reduced probability of being assigned to special education classes or a reduced probability of being held back in grade. Either reduction constitutes a substantial cost reduction for the school system.

b) Low income adolescents who received early education rate their competence in school higher than comparable adolescents who did not have preschool education.

c) As measured by Stanford-Binet and the Wisc tests, preschool programs produce a significant increase in the intellectual functioning of low-income children at least during the critical years of the primary grades in school. (p. 107)

Two important issues were raised by Lazar et al. which I have addressed briefly: the effects of preschool education on low income (poor) children and the cost benefits of preschool education. It has been argued by Lazar et al. and others (Mitchell, 1988; Mckee, 1990; Spodek et al., 1991) that participation in some form of organized preschool education can be of great benefit to all children irrespective of their abilities or circumstances. This claim for universal preschool education has powerful appeal. However, advocates for preschool education have most often been inspired by a belief in its potential to help specific groups of children, notably the "socially disadvantaged", "mentally handicapped" or "physically handicapped". For such children, preschool education is viewed as an especially potent institution which, given adequate resources, can help them overcome difficulties which might otherwise impede their educational progress.

In light of the prevalent societal problem of poverty, part of any solution to the prevention of major social and personal problems in adults is to provide high quality preschool child development programs for young children. The theoretical assumption of this is that upon entering school, economically disadvantaged children are likely to perform less successfully than their middle class peers because they have not developed to the same skills, habits, and attitudes. This lack of development often manifests itself in low scores on tests of intellectual and scholastic ability, which can result in "unnecessary (that is preventable) placement in special education, retention in grade, low scholastic achievement, and, eventually dropping out of high school" (Wargner 1988, p. 63). Apparently, poor children who attend good preprimary education programs are better prepared for kindergarten and first grade. Thus, they begin with a more successful experience in school, which will affect their adult lives (Wargner, 1988).

In a book titled "Investing in Our Children", cited in Schweinhart (1988), the Committee for Economic Development, an organization of leading business executives and educators, summarized the cost-benefit analysis of investing in preschool education by the government thus:

> If we examine the Perry Preschool Program for its investment return and convert all costs and benefits into current values based on a 3 percent real rate of interest, one year of the program is an extraordinary economic buy. It would be hard to imagine that society could find a higher yield for a dollar of investment than that found in preschool programs for its at-risk children. (p. 67)

The striking point made by this committee is that good preschool programs for poor or disadvantaged children can be an excellent investment for taxpayers. The results of this research study indicate that, strictly from the point of view of economics, there is justification for at least one year of public investment in preschool education. One thing to note is that research studies (Schweinhart, 1988; Mckee, 1990; Spodek et al., 1991) have revealed that long-term benefits result **only** from high quality preschool programs--one's characterized by a child development curriculum, qualified teaching staff, administrative leadership, curriculum support, small classes with a teacher and a teaching assistant, enough space and resources, and systematic efforts to involve parents as partners. Undoubtedly, poorly funded programs with unqualified personnel provide nothing more than an immediate benefit of 'supplemental' child care for families (Schweinhart, 1988). To be precise, child development theorists maintain that the preschool years, constitute a critical developmental period, since the rate of physical and mental growth is rapid and the child is more malleable than at any other stage in his or her development. In highlighting the cost benefits of preschool education, Schweinhart (1988) affirms that there is justification for at least one year of public investment in preschool education; in other words, the economic benefits exceed the costs of such a project. Estimates show that for every dollar invested, $7.16 was saved in later costs for remediation and institutional costs. Though such programs may be expensive, their high return on the initial investment makes them more economical than a program that costs less initially but provides little or no return

on the investment. In a nutshell, identification of learning difficulties and intervention occur in preschool, and to address the needs of all children, there must be an equality of educational access. Access to services should not depend on socio-economic, geographical, or ethnic elements. Quality of experiences and prevention of factors that delay learning is a worthy goal of preschool education. I also concur with the opening paragraph of a position paper on early childhood services quoted in The Alberta Teachers Association News (1994) which states,

> A child's susceptibility and responsiveness to positive and enriching environmental influences during the first eight years of life has been well documented in educational, psychological and medical research. Provision of adequate opportunities for the full development of young children should be one of the top priorities of society. (p. 3)

Kagan (1992) affirms that "children as ever-ready learners grow into the intellectual life around them and are stimulated by it. And because learning nourishes development, children need to be in environments where adults and peers will foster learning" (p. 49).

In conclusion, early childhood development is a complex process involving the integration of affective, social, intellectual, and ethical components. As a result of its complexity, prevailing opinion strongly supports the position that the early years are far too important, critical, and valuable to be left to chance; many would not hesitate to say that it is too heavy a burden to be left only to parents and communities. Therefore, provision of such opportunities, in part, becomes the responsibility of the home and, in part, the responsibility of society (i.e., government and community). The division of responsibility depends on a number of circumstances of which the most important may be the home's ability to cope with the assigned role. Also the vision of Jesse Jackson, which brought crowds to their feet during his 1988 Presidential campaign, is quite relevant. He said, "I want to invest in Head Start and Day Care on the front side, rather than Jail Care, and Welfare on the back side." Until we organize ourselves to change the system that produces the paupers, there will continue to be pauperism.

Early Childhood Education Services Programs in Alberta .

I selected Alberta as a focus because the events surrounding the development of Early Childhood Services in this province until 1993 can offer a different perspective from which to view the situation in Ondo State, Nigeria. This implies that there is value in studying the ways in which another society conducts its social arrangements and that we may come to a better understanding of our ways by holding them up to the mirror of a different society. Only with difficulty can the reforms of one country be translated into the framework of another. Nevertheless, that does not mean we can, like Swift's Brobdingnagians or present day Englishmen, continue to squat in the mire of our conviction that we have nothing to learn from anyone (Neave, 1980).

Publicly funded kindergarten programs were established in every province in Canada, except Alberta, by the end of the 1960s. The political dominance of the conservative parties in the province was responsible for the resistance to such universal sponsorship of kindergarten programs (Austin, 1976). The spring of 1973 witnessed the official establishment of the Early Childhood Services Branch, which came under the auspices of the Department of Education headed by Dr. Irving Hastings. The Alberta Department of Education's Program Planning Manual states the purposes of Early Childhood Services (ECS) Programs thus;

a) the coordination at the provincial policy level of services offered by several departments of government to meet the needs of young children and their families;

b) the development and maintenance of needed services throughout the province;

c) the promotion of a coordinated approach to services for young children and their families and the encouragement of inter-agency cooperation among all local agencies which provide these services;

d) the provision of grants and consultative services to community groups and to school jurisdictions for the establishment and maintenance of comprehensive early childhood services programs. (Alberta Education, 1985)

In considering the present day organization and administration of early childhood services programs in Alberta, Affleck and Herson (1974) state that the organizational structure that was set up to carry out the policies for early childhood education services was a reflection of the belief that "the care and education of young children must be a joint and continuing responsibility of the home, the school, and society" (p. 5). The structure of Early Childhood Services in Alberta was similar to that of Project Head Start in the United States. Both were organized to promote strong parental and community involvement in the education of children below school age. The proposals for early childhood programs had to come from advisory committees representing non-profit agencies in the community. Early childhood professionals, however, were available to provide leadership to parents and community at both the local and the government levels. The professionals also helped parents learn more about raising their children by offering parents courses on the topic of child development (Wisniewski, 1989).

Early Childhood Services was designed to serve the needs of young children birth to eight and their families. Nevertheless, the 1973 Operational Plans set the needs for kindergartens and services for children with special needs as the two top priorities, which meant provisions of extensive service and extra funding. The provision of government funding offered the opportunity for public schools to offer kindergarten programs, which invariably increased the number of available and affordable kindergarten spaces. Thus, there were two types of kindergarten operators: school board and private and both were funded by the provincial government. Professional development and standards were established, and all regulations were supervised by Alberta ECS consultants.

In summary, several factors contributed to the establishment of publicly funded universal kindergarten programs across the province of Alberta. The Early Childhood Services' major long range goals, as stipulated by the operational plans of 1973, were the strengthening of the child's dignity and self-worth. In order to effectively achieve this goal, it was important to consider social and educational needs, health, family, and other

related factors that will contribute to the overall development of the 'whole child'. The ECS program standards were set at the provincial level, however, local discretion and initiatives could be exercised. The Department of Education provided early childhood consultants to assist both at local and school levels as the need arose. Despite the uniformity in the program structure across the province, flexibility was allowed and emphasis was placed on play activities. Classroom space and facilities were arranged and constructed in accordance with the program objectives. The provincial government provided grants on the basis of programs operating 400 hours on a half-day basis. The grants for special needs children were larger than those for other children because of the specialized and individualized nature of the program components. Grants paid to private agencies serving handicapped children were equal to those paid to public or separate schools, provided their programs met the ECS guidelines (Lall & Lall, 1983). As a rule, kindergarten teachers had a degree in early childhood education and had to have a teaching certificate. Parents and local communities were actively involved in the ECS programs, and existing physical and human resources were used to the greatest possible extent.

The Development and Operation of Preprimary Education in Nigeria

The disadvantage of people not knowing the past is that they may fail to understand the present. Consequently it was felt that the review of literature should deal with the historical events surrounding the establishment and development of preprimary education in Nigeria. This was deemed important as it would allow the current situation to be compared with the original intent of preprimary education programs. This section of the study also provides relevant information with which the results can be compared.

In traditional pre-colonial Nigeria, the village or town usually had a predominance of partrivirilocal residence as the primary socio-political unit. However, villages or towns of various territorial size, ethnic composition, and political importance were grouped around lineage patriarchs. Children of varying ages usually assisted their parents in their

occupations and some were sent to undergo apprenticeship under masters of some of the trades, depending on the interests of the parents. Today, therefore, the contemporary preschool education scenario in Nigeria is a hybrid heritage and has a variety of legacies from Christian missionaries, Islam, and Western influences as well as some rich indigenous traditions.

Awoniyi (1978) asserts that traditional education is the basis of whatever the child has to learn in formal education because this is still an important and integral part of West African upbringing. He says we have to view some essential information on the historical perspective of the child and his or her background. He explains that,

> It is therefore emphasized in Nigeria, in particular, that the early years of a child's life are marked by rapid learning and what goes on during the years before and between birth and entrance to the formal school can seriously affect the values of a child's experiences in school and throughout life. (Awoniyi, 1982, p. 10)

The opinion expressed by Awoniyi is congruent with the theoretical assumptions upon which preschool education was founded in Nigeria. He also maintains that the situation in Nigeria preschool development has become a factor which continues to affect the organization of work in that sector of education.

According to Fafunwa (1974), the arrival of Christian Missionaries in 1842 in Nigeria opened the gateway to a western system of education. After the Berlin Conference of 1884/85, Africa was partitioned and Nigeria became a British territory. In 1884, Fafunwa continues, the first education ordinance was promulgated creating an Infant Department. These Infant classes were the forerunners of nursery schools in Nigeria. These were reception as well as preparatory classes and were popularly known in Yorubaland (South West of Nigeria) as "Jilesimi or Kilaasi Ijapa", meaning ("turtles' class"). In the West State of Nigeria, the Education Law of 1954 gave official recognition to the establishment of nursery or kindergarten classes. The colonial system of education was imposed and still coexists with the traditional patterns of education even at the preschool level. The newly available roles and system of education produced

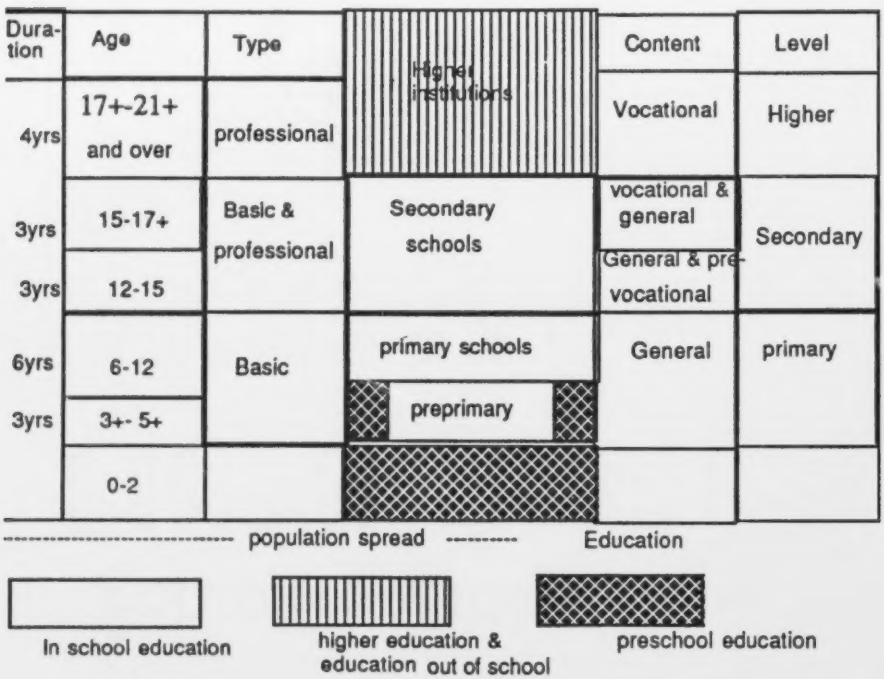
unprecedented consequences and set into motion an ongoing social process that is still very forceful. The imposition of both Western education and civilization, as well as their contributions, have not yet been assimilated nor completely 'Nigerianized'. The collision, no doubt, has affected family life, social opportunity, and equity, as well as children's education. It is important to remark that the current child care scene, or preschool education, is neither entirely indigenous nor entirely alien, and thus "the old traditional ways have continuing relevance, along with the new" (Ellis, 1978, p. 7).

The Federal Government of Nigeria gave Nursery school a legal status in the National Policy on Education in 1981. Prior to this time there was a great public demand for more preschool programs. The demand came largely from middle-class women who were employed at various levels of government, and from various organizations, and from well-to-do individuals. Increased public awareness of the importance of quality preschool programs for children occurred during the late 1970s and early 1980s. The National Policy on Education defined preprimary education as "the education given in educational institutions to children age three to five years plus, prior to their entering primary school" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, p. 10). The summary objectives of preschool education policy were to provide the following: a smooth transition from home to school, preparation for a primary level of education, provision of adequate care and supervision, inculcation of social norms and the spirit of inquiry, creative exploration, cooperation, team spirit, and instruction in the rudiments of numbers through play (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981).

In the 1979/80 budget speech, General Olusegun Obasanjo, the then Head of State, said that the government had decided to encourage preprimary education by providing relevant legislation and guidelines. He said that individuals, private voluntary organizations, and local communities should see it as a social responsibility to establish preprimary or nursery schools. Employers of labor should also do so for the benefit of their workers' families. Private agents consequently set up preschool institutions as

profit-making businesses rather than as a 'social responsibility' (Awoniyi, 1988; Osanyin, 1984; Aina, 1990). The quality of these mushroom preschools was poor and the cost of sending young children to them was far beyond what an average family could afford. According to Awoniyi (1988), there were about one thousand approved private nursery schools in Nigeria in 1988 as compared with about one hundred of them in 1960. Unfortunately, few studies have been conducted to assess the objectives, curriculum, staffing, financing, and other related problems of nursery schools in Nigeria (Onibokun, 1981; Awoniyi, 1988; Uyoata, 1985; Aina, 1990).

Fig. 1
The Nigeria education System



The organization and administration of preschool institutions are quite similar nationwide. Over the years, the organization of Nigerian educational institutions at various levels has been changing in response to the needs of the people and the different policies of the government in power. Presently, the control of education in Nigeria is shared among the federal, state, and local governments. Constitutionally, the system of education in Nigeria is relatively decentralized. Though the administrative structures in the ministries of education differ from state to state, there are more basic similarities than differences. The political system makes each state responsible for the organization and administration of their education. In Ondo State, preprimary education is attached to the State Ministry of Education with a Preprimary Education Division. This division or unit is responsible for all matters relating to the establishment, registration, supervision, and quality control of all preschools in the state. The relatively new system of education in Nigeria is shown in figure one (Fig.1) above.

In the Guidelines Document for the establishment and management of preprimary and private primary schools in Ondo State (Aina, 1990), the following guidelines are given:

> i) Approval for establishing a private Nursery and Primary schools shall be given by the Commissioner of Education.
>
> ii) Each proprietor shall be requested to pay a once for all approval fee of N2,000.00 and annual renewal fee of N1,000.00 for Nursery alone, and N4,000.00 approval fee and annual renewal fee of N2,000.00 for Nursery/Primary.
>
> iii) Approval for registration shall be reviewed every three years in order to check abuse and to ensure the maintenance of good standard but this exercise will involve no payment of registration fee. (p. 119)

The guidelines state the necessary facilities (playgrounds, health facilities, basic fire prevention or safety regulations, the school records, furniture, etc.) for operating private nursery and primary schools. In acknowledging the importance of qualified teachers to teach at this level, the guidelines state that preschool teachers must be kindergarten teachers holding a minimum qualification of Grade Two Teacher's Certificate, plus either National Froebel Diploma, Montessori Diploma, B.Ed in Preprimary Education or any other

qualification in Early Childhood Education approved by the Ministry of Education Ondo State, Nigeria. The stipulations of the guidelines in the area of quality control contradict what operates among the existing preprimary schools in the state. For instance, the guidelines stipulate that;

> Once a private Nursery/Primary school is approved by the state Commissioner of Education, the school is automatically bound by the provisions of the Education Law, Cap. 36 or Laws of Ondo State of Nigeria, 1978 and therefore it is the responsibility of the Area Education Officer to visit the school regularly for quality control purposes. (Aina, 1990 p. 120)

The privately operated preschools maintain their monopoly and perpetuate elitism in a number of ways (i e, charging high fees, privatization, and inaccessibility to children from average homes) without any form of control from the government.

Awoniyi (1978) reviewed status of 22 approved private schools in Oyo state of Nigeria. The results revealed that many of the nursery schools lacked qualified staff, were overcrowded, and poorly supervised by the officials of the state Ministry of Education, yet they charged exorbitant fees. A study by Awoniyi and Ala (1981), reported in Awoniyi (1988), confirmed that the situation was largely unchanged. Reports from other parts of Nigeria showed that most of the preschool institutions were characterized by inadequate and unqualified staff, lack of resources, and undue exploitation of parents (Awoniyi, 1988; Aina, 1990).

In another development, Onyeausi (1980) conducted a study on the problems and prospects of preprimary education in Owerri and Oguta in Imo state, Nigeria. He surveyed nine nursery school in Owerri and one in Oguta. He found, among other things, that nursery schools were mostly patronized by the 'elites' inspite of the fact that many of these private nursery schools lacked qualified staff and appropriate facilities. A review of other studies in nursery school provision reflect shortage of qualified personnel, lack of supervisions by the ministry officials, exploitation, and promotion of educational inequality (Osanyin, 1984). Osanyin's study was based on the cost of preschool education in some

selected nursery schools in Nigeria. The findings of this study reveal that school buildings were far from the ideal and many were lacking sufficient space for outdoor activities.

Many educators, scholars, organizations, and well-meaning individuals have called for the government to take over preschool education in order to decrease wastage, elitism, and educational inequality (Onibokun, 1981). To buttress the possibility of government's active involvement in preschool education and the likely positive results, Awoniyi (1988 citing Maduewesi 1981) affirms that the government can participate fully in preschool education programs like many other countries have done. He elaborated on Maduewesi's description of steps which the government of Anambra state in Nigeria had taken to formulate guidelines for establishing nursery schools and the practical supervisory functions performed by the state Ministry of Education. In conclusion, the body of literature reviewed in this chapter is revealing. The issue of leaving preschool education solely in the hands of private individuals, inspite of the present consequences and predicaments, should help us determine whether this decision promotes equality of educational opportunity and accessibility or serves instead to perpetuate and consolidate educational inequality cum social inequality and elitism in a "free and egalitarian Nigerian society".

African Perspectives

Since independence, many African nations have invested heavily in education (using up to 30% of GNP of their budget in education). As a result, very impressive quantitative achievements have been registered. Between 1960 and 1983, enrollments increased at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.

The increase was attributed to a belief firmly rooted in the African nationalist "equality movement" of the late 1950s and early 1960s and a strong belief that education can promote that equality. One of the major highlights of the meeting of Ministers of Education held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 1961 revealed that African governments

expressed their commitment to achieving universal primary education. Therefore, the year 1980 was targeted for the achievement of universal primary education.

However, many African nations have lately witnessed stagnation of enrollments, decline of educational quality, instances of high unit costs, and increasing unemployment among the educated (World Bank, 1988). These problems emanate in an environment in which there are massive demographic pressures on educational systems, the inevitability of financial austerity, and the prospect that an increasing number of children are entering school malnourished and ill. As a result, there has been a de-emphasis on quantitative considerations and debate on issues of both the quality and the relevance of education. Also equally important has been the issue of early childhood education among African countries.

An important feature in many African countries is the entry of mothers into the work force, particularly mothers of infants and preschool children, which means they are away from their homes and children for long periods during the day. As mentioned in Chapter One, there has been a shift in child care arrangements of working mothers. For instance, the older siblings or grandparents and other relatives used to look after younger children. Nowadays older children are attending school, and many families live far from their extended family. This has resulted in an increase of children being kept in the work place by their mothers. This, in turn, has resulted in the establishment of schools for young children. Some of these preschool centers offer educational services, such as preparing the child for entrance into formal school. In other cases, the provision has been mainly of a custodial nature (Heron & Otaala, 1982).

Apart from a few African countries which have preschool programs for the large populations of preschool children, on the whole only a minority of young children in Africa are actually enrolled in preschool programs. Heron and Otaala (1982) state that "on the basis of available data on total enrollment at this level of education (preprimary), Africa remains one of the most under-privileged regions of the world" (p. 10).

Summary

A study of what other countries are doing to develop preschool programs provides interesting and important contrasts to early childhood education in Ondo State in regard to the degree of commitment of public funds, effective regulation procedures, preschool teachers' qualifications, and program objectives. Among the contrasts are the following:

1. All the countries included in this review have a strong interest in developing preschool programs that are more than custodial settings. Much emphasis is placed on both developmental and educational functioning as prime objectives. In contrast, the debate about preschool programs in Ondo State Nigeria centers on providing private, inexpensive, and substandard preschool programs to achieve a high level of income maintenance without much regard for the benefits that children receive from the experience.
2. European countries, Australia, China, and Canada, just to mention but a few, are willing to commit a sizable portion of their funds for public support of preschool programs. In contrast, Ondo State has left the funding of programs to the private individuals. The most striking contrast is the large number of commercial and proprietary preprimary operations that are found in Ondo State. Few such preschool programs are found elsewhere. Instead, government funded and government administered programs predominate in other nations. Unfortunately, preschool programs have become a profit making industry in Ondo State.
3. Other countries have recognized the need to provide preschool programs for all families and to make it possible for poor parents to obtain high quality preschool programs at little or no cost due to federal and local participation in funding such programs for working parents. Thus, preschool programs have been recognized as a public responsibility, and the planning of services takes into account that parents and children have a right to good programs. In contrast, both the federal and the state governments in Nigeria have taken little or no action to expand or improve preschool programs.

There has never been allocation of funds to preschool programs, therefore many children from near-poverty families go without preschool programs.

4. Preschool programs in other countries place great importance on the educational qualifications of preschool teachers. In some countries there are laws that mandate preschools meet specific programming and training qualifications. Many countries have ongoing programs to educate preschool teachers so as to maintain a satisfactory number of qualified staff. In contrast, there is wide disparity among the states in Nigeria and even among the preschool centers in setting standards regarding the education and experience of staff members. Consequently many programs employ individuals who have no special qualifications for the important task of caring for children.
5. Obviously, not all countries examined in this chapter have achieved perfect coordination of preschool programs, but most provide a model of integrated programs that is lacking in Ondo State. Perhaps the lack of planning in Nigeria can be traced to a lack of leadership at the federal level of government and the absence of a coherent and well-defined policy to give direction to the local communities. Diversity of programs need not be sacrificed. Indeed, it may be encouraged, given the sufficient support from government. However, a catch-as-catch-can approach to solving a mounting problem can only increase the frustration that many parents face in trying to make plans for out-of-home care for their preschool age children.
6. Regulation of preschool programs is universally regarded as essential to maintain high quality programs. Other countries have in place federal regulations that must be met, and the standards set by the government are regarded as useful, rather than restrictive in nature. The National Policy on Education published in 1981 outlines the objectives of preprimary education, other regulations therein are vague and confusing. Given the wide suspicion about government regulation, there appears to be little interest in setting national standards for preschool programs.

7. Finally, other nations see preschool programs as one component of a comprehensive social welfare program that is designed to improve the quality of life for all families. In contrast, preschool programs in Ondo State seek to meet some needs but neglect others, such as the conditions associated with poverty and malnutrition.

Roby (1973) points out that:

> The comprehensive children's services of Sweden, Israel and other nations are built on the belief that all human beings, including children, have the right to a decent level of well-being as well as the belief that the nation must concern itself with the welfare of its children today because they will be its citizens tomorrow. (p. 301)

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, and generally referred to as "the giant of Africa", has yet to fulfill its obligation to millions of children who need safe, affordable preschool programs. Other nations, with fewer resources, have done much to ensure that infants and young children of working parents receive the care and education that is essential for their social, intellectual, and emotional development. Guaranteeing Nigerian children the same opportunity is a challenge that must be taken seriously if we intend to keep the promise of a good life for our nation's future citizens.

Conclusions in Global Perspective

A global perspective on the operation, organization, and administration of preschool education programs can provide a broader context from which to view the current situation in Ondo State and Nigeria as a whole. Whether it be in the Western capitalist industrial nations, or in the Eastern socialist industrial countries, or in the so called 'developed' and 'developing' worlds, there is as yet no egalitarian society, and stratification (i.e. structured social inequality) is the principal factor responsible for the inequality of educational opportunity (Ugbor, 1991). I concur with Awoniyi (1979) that there is no society that does not care for its children, but there are differences in the patterns, styles, and emphasis of education among societies. Therefore, the development of preschool education took varying dimensions in different countries. They are also called by different names in

different places, and have different levels of government involvement and operations. Also the age level at which children may be admitted, or eligible for admission, vary within countries as well as among them.

In some countries preschool education is considered to be the responsibility of welfare or charity organizations or private individuals; in other places the value of group education for all young children is basic to the preschool program. The required qualifications for teachers also differ. But ideally, all teachers are expected to have appropriate background in nursery education, though in practice many of the teachers who operate in certain countries at the preschool level are unqualified for the job. Among the major factors influencing this variation are the level of economic development in a country and the nature of involvement of the national government in the provision of early childhood services. Where the governments see preschool education as a burden, the provision of early childhood services is not a subject of major concern. Consequently, the actual range of the proportion of preschool aged children attending programs is probably below 30% because of the high costs and lack of the awareness (Olmsted, 1992).

The institutions serving any country should meet the needs of that country. Preschool education is no exception. Therefore, the status of preschool institutions in a country correlates with the advancement of the nation's schools. Organization and administrative arrangements vary with the country. For instance, in the dissolved Soviet Union, preschool institutions were established and operated under the direction of the Ministry of Education. These schools were funded by the state, while parents paid fees based upon wages and family size, and this perhaps covered only the children's meals. Australian supervisory bodies vary from state to state. For instance, preschools in Tasmania are under the Education Department, while Victoria delegates administrative responsibility to the Department of Health. Australian preschool education has had a long time dependence on parental and charitable efforts. Universal availability of preschool education has, however, virtually been achieved in most States and the Territories by

making provisions through the school system, but parents still give financial support in some states (Lall & Lall, 1983). The Israelis made kindergarten for five year olds a part of their compulsory educational system from the out set. Since the population of Israel came from many countries, the children needed a chance to socialize and to learn the Hebrew language and culture. Preschool education is under a special Department within the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the funding comes from the local bodies, no fees is charged to parents.

In the People's Republic of China, the major form of early childhood education is the kindergarten, which enrolls 3 to 6 year old children. According to Olmested (1992), there were sufficient kindergartens for 20% of preschool aged children. Local communities sponsored 75% of these kindergartens, and organizations such as factories, the army, and academic institutions supported another 20%. Boards of education sponsored the remaining 5%, which were attached to the local school system. However, the great majority of families with preschool aged children live in rural areas (just like Nigeria) where early childhood programs are scarce and very few families have access to the services. In French Belgium a free, government sponsored early childhood education program called the "ecolematernelle" is currently available to all 3 and 4 year old children. Preschool education programs are generally housed in the local school building and controlled by government agents.

Throughout the United States, apart from the larger scale federally funded programs (i. e. Head Start), numerous projects are simultaneously being carried out, some oriented to parent education, and some aimed at specific groups such as minority or handicapped children (Spoked et al., 1991). All States now have started funded kindergartens and some have full time day care for some families.

Most preschool teachers are women, and the salary scale for women is lower than that for men in some countries, even when the work is of comparable value and difficulty. The only difference is when preschool education is part of a public school system; both the

status and the salary of the teachers are comparable to those of other public school teachers. Without a doubt, education will continue to play an important role in early childhood services world wide. Several arguments have been raised in support of government intervention and active involvement in preschool programs. Some argue for the delivery of early childhood programs through the school on the grounds that an enrichment approach could be applied: the premise of such argument is that the target population would be universal, there would be a destigmatization of services and it would be possible to maintain higher and uniform standards, (e.g. teacher-child ratios and physical facilities).

The point to be drawn from all these cases is that if preschool education is not made both universal and free it is very likely that a proportion of the neediest children will continue to miss out. The emphasis is that preschool education is beneficial to all children and to discriminate between groups of children would be unjust. Perhaps a service solely directed towards the poor tends to become a poor service as well. To this end, any schemes which discriminate among children may not only endanger their lives but permanently stigmatized them (Commonwealth of Australia, 1981).

In summary, the literature reveals a resurgence of interest in early childhood education world wide and that preschool education had found a niche within public education system in most countries. Preschool education still has an emphasis on the early years, serves as a link between home and school, and prepares children for their wider social and educational responsibilities. Various countries continually evaluate and modify what they do to keep in step with changing needs of children in their society, whether it be a newly emerging nation or one with long established educational traditions. Apparently, preschool education has been solidly established and effectively controlled in many countries, but the situation is still somewhat confused in Nigeria, which is why I embarked on this study. Perhaps this study can suggest alternative approaches for adjusting the supply/demand balance of early childhood education in Ondo State, Nigeria. Undoubtedly,

exemplary public education begins with the provision of stimulating learning opportunities in early childhood.

CHAPTER 3

Research Methodology

In this section, I will discuss the philosophical underpinnings and methodological implications of qualitative case study research as it applies to this study. The research design, a case study utilizing an interpretivist approach in orientation and methodology, includes focused interviews and document analysis as the main methods of collecting data.

The Philosophical Assumptions of Interpretivist Studies

Rist (1980) and Patton (1990) maintain that different kinds of problems require different research methodologies. These authors also caution and encourage educational researchers to consider an alternative paradigm that stresses "understanding that focuses on the meaning of human behavior, the context of social interaction, an empathetic understanding of subjective states, and the connection between the subjective states and behavior" (p. 7). Research of this nature is frequently referred to as "qualitative". Qualitative research is very diverse, drawing on many theoretical and methodological traditions. Filstead (1970) enumerates some of the possible methodologies suitable to qualitative research.

> Qualitative methodology refers to those research strategies, such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, total participation in the activity being investigated, field work, etc., which allow the researcher to obtain first-hand knowledge about the empirical social world in question. Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to "get close to the data," thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself. (p. 6)

In addition, the qualitative or naturalistic research paradigm is preferred over the others because it allows for what Denzin (1989) calls "thick description" of the people, places, and conversations; as well as an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in natural settings and description of complex phenomenon. Guba (1981) maintains that each paradigm rests on certain key assumptions and that "it is proper to select that paradigm whose assumptions are best met by the phenomenon being investigated" (p. 76). The

decision to use this approach rather than a rationalistic approach is based on the characteristics of naturalistic paradigms detailed below.

Firstly, the rationalistic paradigm is based on the assumption that there is a single, objective reality—the world out there—that we can observe, know, and measure. In contrast, the interpretivist research assumes that there are multiple realities with behavior driven by people's moment to moment vision of the world. The interpretivist inquiry will "diverge rather than converge as more and more is known, and all 'parts' of reality are interrelated so that the study of any one part necessarily influences all other parts" (Guba, 1981, p. 77).

Secondly, the rationalistic paradigm rests on the assumption that the inquirer can maintain a certain distance from the object of the investigation. This implies that the relationship between the researcher and the object is essentially one of independence. In the naturalistic paradigm the researcher and the respondent (object) are said to be interrelated, with each influencing the other. As Merriam (1988, p. 17) says, "a researcher cannot get 'outside' the phenomenon."

Thirdly, the rationalistic paradigm assumes a generalization of long lasting truth statements that are context-free. This implies that the researcher "aims at developing monothetic knowledge and hence focuses on the similarities between objects of inquiry (similarities being the stuff out of which generalizations are made)" (Guba, 1981, p. 77). In contrast, a naturalistic paradigm assumes that generalizations are not possible, but that the researchers are more interested in deriving universal statements of general social processes than statements of commonalty between similar settings (i.e. classrooms). In addition, qualitative researchers are less concerned with the question of whether their findings are generalizable.

This study, a qualitative case study design, is thus descriptive and inductive in the analysis. The goals of this study are congruent with naturalistic paradigm assumptions—to develop "idiographic knowledge" (Guba, 1988; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Interpretive researchers, despite "differences in methodology and breadth of research focus,...share a commitment to understanding the complexity of the phenomenon of interest to them" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 416). Jacob (1988) listed three attributes of interpretive research: the research is conducted in a natural setting; stress is placed on the importance of understanding participants' perspectives; and questions and methods emerge in the process of field work. The meaning sought is understood only through dialogue and negotiation between the researcher and the researched. It is imperative for the researchers to be responsible and sensitive to the inequality of power that may exist between themselves and those with whom they are working.

Bruner (1990) opines that interpretive inquiry compels both the researcher and the researched to see themselves in a new way. At the heart of interpretive inquiry is a passion to understand the meaning that people are constructing in their everyday situated actions, that is, actions "situated in a cultural setting, and in the mutually interacting intentional states of the participants" (p. 19). Interpretive inquiry therefore has the potential to allow access to the contextual issues that give meaning to research findings and, in so doing, can provide understandings that allow us to make sense of existing positivist work. To this end, Bolster (1983) asserts that:

> The more I became aware of and experienced with this methodology [interpretive research], the more I became convinced that of all the models of research I know, this model has the greatest potential for generating knowledge that is both useful and interesting to teachers .... this approach focuses on situated meanings which incorporate the various reactions and perspectives of students. In common with the teacher's perspective, it assumes the multiple causation of events; the classroom is viewed as a complex social system in which both direct and indirect influences operate. Unanticipated contingencies potentially illuminate rather than confound understanding since reaction to the unexpected often highlights the salient meanings assigned to what is normal. (pp. 305-306)

Hymes (1982) argued forcefully that the interpretive researcher is engaged in an endeavor that is "most compatible with a democratic way of life, the least likely to produce a world in which experts control knowledge at the expense of those who are studied" (p. 57).

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), qualitative research is "an umbrella term to refer to several research strategies that share certain characteristics" (p. 2). These characteristics are;

a) Qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument.

b) Qualitative research is descriptive.

c) Qualitative researchers are concerned with process in a setting rather than simply with outcomes or products.

d) Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively, and

e) "Meaning" is of essential concern to the qualitative approach. (pp. 27-29)

Snow and Anderson (1991) list and explain the characteristics of case studies thus:

1 ***Holistic analysis of bounded systems of action.*** Case studies strive toward a relatively holistic understanding of cultural systems of action. Case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues or processes that are fundamental to understanding the system being studied.

2 ***Multi-perspectival or polyphonic analyzes.*** This means in practical terms, that the researcher(s) consider(s) not only the voices and experiences of the range of actors of focal concern but also the perspectives and actions of other relevant groups of actors and the interaction among them.

3 ***Triangulated research.*** This refers to the use of multiple data sources, methods, investigators, and the theoretical perspectives in the study of some empirical phenomenon.

4 ***Capturing social processes.*** This facilitates the possibility of capturing and analyzing events and happenings, interactions and relationships, and groups and institutions as they emerge and evolve across time.

5 ***Open-ended research and serendipitous findings.*** Case studies tend to have an open-ended, emergent quality that facilitates the discovery of both unanticipated findings and data sources. Serendipity is the discovery, by chance or sagacity, of valid results which were not sought for. (pp. 152-163)

In summary, a case study involves characteristics or configurations of a particular unit of analysis— preschool education program in Ondo State is a single, bounded system

that could be best described in context. The desired end product is a holistic integrated description and predictive information. Also, this interpretive research case study has an important place in research on the education of young children. It has the potential, in the negotiated, collaborative relationship between the researcher and the researched, to give voice and visibility to those groups, children, and practitioners who historically have been silenced and isolated. When those children and practitioners stand in front of the mirror that research provides them, the image they see should be their own (Walsh, et al, 1993).

The importance of case studies is also emphasized by Sjoberg, et al. (1991), when they assert that researchers "can deal with the reality behind appearances, with contradictions and the dialectical nature of social life, as well as with a whole that is more than the sum of its parts" (p. 39). The authors go further to say that case studies "provide us with fundamental sociological knowledge of human agents, communities, organizations, nation-states, empires, and civilizations" (p. 39). Interpretive researchers find the well done case study both interesting and persuasive. As Donmoyer (1990) pointed out, case studies have the virtues of being accessible and interpersonally meaningful; when reading a good case study, we get a chance to experience the world through the eyes of the author as well as the subject of the study.

The qualitative case study can be defined as "an intensive holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources" (Merriam, 1988, p. 16). According to Yin (1994), a case study is a form of inquiry that:

i) investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when

ii) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which

iii) multiple sources of evidence are used. (p. 23)

In the same vein, Bogdan and Biklen (1992) conceptualize case studies as "a detailed examination of one setting or one single subject, or one single depository of documents, or one particular event" (p. 58). Miles and Huberman (1984) include "a school, a program, a specific project, a network, a family, a community" in their definition of a case study (p. 28).

Limitations of case studies. Some of the characteristics of case studies that are seen as strengths may also be weaknesses (Merriam, 1988). Merriam asserts that case studies are limited by the "sensitivity and integrity of the investigator....The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis" (pp. 33-34). Another limitation of case studies is what Guba and Lincoln (1981) call "unusual problems of ethics" (p. 378) which implies that researchers should be aware of biases that can affect the final product. MacDonald and Walker (1977) note the limitation of ethical issues especially in relation to the cost, time, and political influences and state that,

> At all levels of the system what people think they are doing, what they say they are doing, what they appear to others to be doing, and what in fact they are doing, may be sources of considerable discrepancy....Any research which threatens to reveal these discrepancies threatens to create dissonance, both personal and political. (p. 186)

This study was not an evaluation of a program, which could perhaps reveal some government officials lapses, but every opinion expressed by the government agents and parents or individuals, was interpreted and protected by the anonymity of the participants.

Methods and Sources of Data Collection

There was a dearth of research materials dealing directly with the issues being investigated in this study. Therefore, the nature of this study was "exploratory and indicative" (Burton, 1981, p. 10). This implies that the study explored the beliefs, values, and aspirations of selected school administrators, preschool teachers, and parents regarding the incorporation of preschool education into the public school system. In addition, there was an attempt to indicate the range and types of issues emanating from these perspectives.

The pragmatics of primary data collection for this study were focused interviews and document analysis. The focused interview questions were open-ended which allowed free responses from the respondents, some who were or are still involved in the provisions of preschool education in Ondo State. The nature of the data required an inductive process of analysis. However, there was flexibility as to the research strategies. This was necessary and according to Wax (1985),

> Strict and rigid adherence to any method, technique or doctrinaire position may, for the field worker, become like confinement in a cage. If he [sic] is lucky or even cautious, a field worker may formulate a research problem so that he will find all the answers he [sic] needs within his [sic] cage. But if he [sic] finds himself [sic] in a field situation where he [sic] is limited by a particular method, theory, or technique he [sic] will do well to slip through the bars and try to find out what is really going on. (p. 10)

The use of multiple data sources, which Denzin (1989) calls "data triangulation," has three data points or sources: "persons, situations and contexts, and time" (p. 237). This study tapped all three. Multiple methods included focused interviews, document analysis, and casual/conversational interviewing. The participants included the Ministry of Education officials, early childhood education consultants, administrators, teachers, and parents. The multiple organizations included the Ministry of Education, school systems, preschool education programs, and professional organizations. The sites for gathering the data included the archives, libraries, schools, Ministry of Education offices, a rural and an urban community, and government educational offices. The process of triangulation was therefore facilitated as a result of the use of multiple data sources.

Interviews as a source of data. The interview was the most appropriate data gathering technique for this study because of the richness of data that could be obtained, the lesser chance of incomplete responses, and the interviewer's relationship with a number of the interviewees. Interviews take various forms that range from a highly formal approach to an informal approach to interviewing. According to Madge (1985), informal approaches include the non-directive interview, the focused interview, life histories, and the informal interview. Of these four, the one seen as most appropriate for this study was

the focused interview. Yin (1994) suggests that a focused interview may be "open-ended and assume a conversational manner, but the interviewer is more likely to be following a certain set of questions derived from the case study protocol" (p. 89). He warns that "the specific questions must be carefully worded, so that the investigator appears naive about the topic and allows the respondent to provide a fresh commentary about the topic" (p. 89). Semi-structured is the term used by Merriam (1988) to denote a focused interview. She argues that in a semi structured or focused interview, "certain information is desired from all the respondents. These interviews are guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored" (p. 74). The focused interview format allows the inquirer to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging world view of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.

Merton et al. (1990) suggest four ways of distinguishing the focused interview from other types of interviews. These authors assert that in the focused interview, the people being interviewed "are known to have been involved in a particular situation" (p. 25). The significant aspects of the topic under study have undergone prior analysis by the researcher, an interview guide is prepared and the interview is constructed so as to focus on "the subjective experiences of persons exposed to the pre-analyzed situation in an effort to ascertain their definition of the situation" (pp. 25-27). Four basic characteristics of the focused interview could be identified from the above statement, and all the four basic characteristics are congruent with this study. For instance, the first feature identified was quite relevant to this study because all the respondents to be interviewed had been involved, or are still involved, in both the administrative capacity and the operations of preschool education programs in Ondo State. The fact that I have been involved as a teacher for quite some time now in preschool education programs in Ondo State fulfilled the second characteristic. I have written and presented papers on preschool education in Ondo State, and my Bachelor's project examined how traditional games and plays could be incorporated into preschool activities, while my master's thesis was based on the operations of

preschool institutions in Ondo State. Therefore, to claim some prior analysis of the situation under study is justified. Again, the interview guide was based on the insights gained from the experiences stated above and most importantly from the review of literature. Merton et al. (1990) also referred to "the subjective experiences of the persons exposed to the pre-analyzed situation in an effort to ascertain their definition of the situation" (p. 25). The prior analyzed situation as it relates to this study is that the research focuses on people involved in preschool education programs in Ondo State, and attempts to ascertain their definition of the possible incorporation of preschool education of children ages 3-5 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981) into the public school system. This is seen as fulfilling the fourth criteria. Undoubtedly, focused interviews would allow the flexibility required for this exploratory case study research.

Unit of analysis. Adelman et al. (1983) maintain that the "unit of analysis, or 'the case', can be an individual, ***a program,*** (italics added) an institution, a group, an event, a concept" (p. 2). This case study is investigating the preschool education programs in Ondo State from its inception to date. Patton (1990) affirms that the "key issue in determining the unit of analysis is to decide 'what it is you want to be able to say something about at the end of the study'" (p. 100). Adelman et. al (1983) suggest that the "researcher might also want to look at the total program. Thus the case could be a holistic, intensive, rich description of the whole program itself" (p. 3). The focus of this case study research is on one unit of analysis, that is, the preschool programs in Ondo State, though there may be numerous events, participants, or phases of a process subsumed under the unit (McMillan & Schumacher, 1984).

Interview sample and method. In selecting an interview sample within this case study the non-probabilistic sampling method seems to be most appropriate. In order to solve qualitative problems, such as discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences, non-probabilistic sampling strategy takes priority. Chein (1981) says the most common form of this sampling strategy is called

purposive, while Patton (1990) calls it purposeful. Patton opines that purposeful or purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, and gain insight; therefore, one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most. The interview sample includes members of Ondo State's Ministry of Education from the preprimary division, administrators and teachers of preprimary institutions, and parents in a rural and an urban community.

Focused interviews with open-ended questions were employed in collecting data during the course of this study. This strategy enabled the respondents to react to the broad issues which I raised (e.g., What is your view and belief about the present provision and delivery of ECE in Ondo State?). The respondents were able to structure their own account of the situation from their perspectives or they were able to provide their own views. With focused or semi-structured interviews, there was the likelihood of getting comparable data across subjects. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggest the following procedures when conducting focused interviews.

> At the beginning of the project, for example, it might be important to use the more free-flowing, exploratory interview because your purpose at that point is to get a general understanding of a range of perspectives on a topic. After the investigatory work has been done, you may want to structure interviews more in order to get comparable data across a larger sample or to focus on particular topics that emerged during the preliminary interviews. (p. 136)

The initial consideration in developing the interview schedule was to determine the topics to be addressed. The topics for the schedule or guide emerged from two sources: 1) the review of literature in chapter two, and 2) my own background as an early childhood teacher. Some leading questions were developed as an "aide memoire" or an agenda of topics or themes to be covered. They served as a data bank that was expanded as new issues surfaced. Some leading or guiding questions were formulated under the following generic headings:

1) Interviewee's knowledge about the historical events surrounding the development of preschool education in Nigeria and later in Ondo State.

2) Interviewee's background and involvement with preprimary education programs in Ondo State.

3) Present organization, administration, and the implications for preschool operation.

4) Equity and access to preschool education: The relevance of Nigeria's philosophy of education, the acknowledgment of the importance of preschool education in the National Policy on Education, and the actual practices.

5) Problems related to privately operated preschool institutions and the possible incorporation into the public school system. Possible short-comings and merits if incorporated. The merits and the shortcomings could be in the areas of:

i) Facilities

ii) Program needs

iii) Administration and organization

iv) Equal opportunity and access

v) Children benefits or otherwise

vi) Teacher benefits or otherwise

vii) Skilled personnel.

The process of the interviews required some procedures or methods. Therefore, I turned to the suggestions raised by Burgess (1984).

> First, it is essential to listen carefully in order to participate in the conversation, to pose particular questions on topics that have not been covered or need developing. Secondly, it is important not to interrupt the person or persons who are being interviewed.... Thirdly, interviewers need to monitor their own comments, gestures, and actions as they may convey particular meanings to those who are interviewed which may advance or impede the interview. Finally, interviewers need to ensure that similar topics are covered in interviews where the data are to be used to make comparisons. (p. 111)

The suggestions enumerated above guided the conduct of these focused interviews, bearing in mind that the nature of the interview was semi-structured which allowed the interviewees to talk about the items they felt were relevant. Although the initial questions were introduced by the interviewer, whenever the interviewee moved to other topic areas

included in the interview schedule, he or she was allowed to pursue those areas. Sometimes, participants talked about issues that were not relevant to the research topic, in such situations I carefully drew their attention to the issues at stake. Situations like this required being tactical and sensitive.

Documents as a source of data. Even though documents are usually produced for reasons other than research, they served as another source of data for this study. The quality of available documents was a critical factor that I assessed at the commencement of the study. In analyzing the authenticity of documents some of the strategies employed by historical researchers were adopted. For instance, external criticism determines whether or not the sources are authentic, while internal criticism determines whether or not the contents of the sources are accurate or trustworthy (Macmillan & Schumacher, 1984). Likewise, in judging the value of any document as a data source, Merriam (1988) suggests that:

> One can ask whether it contains information or insights relevant to the research question and whether it can be acquired in a reasonably practical yet systematic manner. If these two questions can be answered in the affirmative, there is no reason not to use a particular source of data. (p. 105)

It has been suggested that the researcher must try to reconstruct the process by which the data (documents) were originally assembled. To be trustworthy, the source must be as close to the actual event as possible. Any documents obtained can be used to ascertain facts only when the source is authentic and trustworthy (Macmillan & Schumacher, 1984). Sources of documents in this study included policies, task forces, and other demographic variables of both the state and the two communities involved.

Casual/conversational interviewing. Two forms of interviews were employed to collect data in this study: 1) the focused interviews and 2) casual or conversational interviewing. The former was used to obtain specific data, while the latter was employed to check perceptions and ascertain whether there were any new data from the respondents which had not been previously discerned. This was necessary because the

truth of a situation never reveals itself by itself, but it has to be provoked (Smith 1991). This was the task of my personal reflections on the interviews/conversations with the participants. After receiving permission from the respondents, a tape recorder was used throughout the process of the interviews.

Gaining access. Getting permission and the certainty of availability of sources are essential to the researcher before the commencement of the study. Gaining access is an essential phase in the research process is a prerequisite condition for research to be conducted. Secondly, access influences the reliability and validity of the data that the researcher subsequently obtains (Burgess, 1984).

In light of this, permission was obtained from Ondo State Ministry of Education to view all the relevant available documents in the offices, storage areas, and archives. Apart from the personal contact I had with all the participants to obtain permission for interviews, official permission was obtained from the Ministry of Education Ondo State to interview the school administrators and teachers. In addition, within a short period I established rapport (gained their confidence) with the participants in a rural and an urban community before the commencement of the interviews. This enabled me to obtain the actual data required for this study rather than "listening to what I wanted to hear". Sensitivity was my watchword.

Data Analysis

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) explain that data analysis "involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 145). These procedures guided the analysis of data collected for this study so as to make sense of the information and, more importantly, to answer the broad research questions presented earlier. In order to do this effectively, Owens (1982) suggests that,

> Typically the strategy will emphasize data-gathering in the early phases of the project. Checking, verifying, testing, probing, and confirming activities

> will follow in a funnel-like design resulting in less data-gathering in later phases of the study along with a concurrent increase in analysis-checking, verifying, and confirming. (p. 11)

Owens' suggestion emphasizes data analysis as an ongoing process during the data gathering phase of the research and after. In this study, the process of data collection and analysis were recursive and dynamic. Data analysis took place during and after data collection. While searching through the data for regularities and patterns, as well as for topics the data covered, I wrote down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These words and phrases became coding categories which I employed in the process of data analysis throughout the course of this study.

Establishing Trustworthiness/Credibility and Completeness

In establishing validity in the rationalistic paradigm, emphasis is placed on internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity; in contrast, the naturalistic paradigm according to Guba and Lincoln (1988) emphasizes thus:

> It is clear that internal validity, which is nothing more than an assessment of the degree of isomorphism between a study's findings and the "real" world, cannot have meaning as a criterion in a paradigm that rejects a realist ontology. If realities are instead assumed to exist only in mentally constructed form, what sense could it make to look for isomorphism? External validity, a concept that embodies the very essence of generalizability, likewise can have little meaning if the "realities" to which one might wish to generalize exist in different forms in different minds, depending on different encountered circumstances and history, based on different experiences, interpreted within different value systems. (p. 236)

The authors justify why the philosophical assumptions of the naturalistic paradigm must be congruent with the approach to trustworthiness or credibility. Reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon, waiting to be discovered, observed, and measured. Therefore, to assess isomorphism between data collected and the "reality" from which they were derived is an inappropriate determinant of validity (Merriam, 1988). The credibility requirement involves the establishment of a process that enables an independent reader to believe in the interpretation of the data. This does not mean replication of the study by a different researcher (Bogdan

& Biklen, 1992; Patton, 1990). As opined by Stake (1988), "We should note that validity depends on the use to which the findings are put.... Accuracy of observing and reporting is not a matter of everyone seeing and reporting the same thing, observers have different vantage points. Scenes change" (p. 263). Another factor that affects credibility is completeness. Stake says this involves the researcher ensuring that all methods within the researcher's disposal are used to obtain information that would enhance credibility and completeness.

In this study, the following strategies were employed to establish credibility. First, the study was conducted and analyzed over a period of twelve months during which time an interactive process of data collection and analysis allowed for validation of data, for reflection, and for discussions with participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest peer debriefing as a way of enhancing credibility. In this study, the data collected and the methodology, as well as the analysis procedures, were discussed and reviewed with a colleague throughout the process. As well, all the data collected were kept intact so that they could be examined by an independent person.

In addition, triangulation was maintained through the use of multiple methods, with multiple participants, in multiple situations across multiple organizations. I conducted follow-up casual interviews to clarify concepts or for cross-checking the data earlier obtained both during the interviews and in the documents. As mentioned earlier, the research processes were documented by establishing what Guba and Lincoln (1988) call an "audit trail", in the form of an extensive case record, thus addressing the issues of dependability and confirmability.

In order to address the issue of transferability in this study, I employed a rich and "thick description" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This is similar to what Patton (1990) calls "extrapolation".

> Unlike the usual meaning of the term *generalization,* an *extrapolation* clearly connotes that one has gone beyond the narrow confines of the data to think about other applications of the finding. Extrapolations are modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to others situations under

> similar, but not identical conditions. Extrapolations are logical, thoughtful, and problem-oriented rather than statistical and probabilistic. Extrapolations can be particularly useful when based on information - rich samples and designs. (p.489).

This study, therefore, included the description and specification of everything that a reader may need to know in order to understand the findings.

Ethical Concerns

Differences in research design lead to differences in the relative weight of various ethical issues (Merriam, 1988). But in a qualitative case study like this, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge at two points: during the collection of data and in the dissemination of findings (Walker, 1980). Therefore, ethical concerns with respect to maintaining the anonymity of the participants in the study affected the ways in which the data were stored and reported. The administrators, teachers, and parents who participated in this case study were asked to sign an informed consent form. All recorded tapes, transcripts, and word processing disks were kept in a filing cabinet in my home. All names and identifying characteristics of the participants were changed for reporting purposes. While it was impossible to guarantee anonymity, every effort was made to minimize the risk of identification of the participants in this study.

CHAPTER 4

Themes Emerging From The Interviewees: Their Views, Beliefs, And Aspirations

The purpose of this Chapter is to present the findings of the study. The results and discussion will be presented in the form of themes that emerged from the data. Before presenting this information, a brief description of the interviewees will be presented as well as the demographic data and a description of the two communities where the research was conducted. More information about the interviewees can be seen in Appendix 1.

The Interviewees Selected for this Study

Fourteen individuals have been interviewed for this study. Two are school administrators and members of Ondo State Ministry of Education. One is the Deputy Director of Education (Suyi) and the second person is the Chief Education Officer (Sarah) in the preprimary education section. These two administrators have a good background in education but not in preprimary education. As a result of inservice courses, attendance at preschool workshops and seminars, and their long years of teaching experience, they are considered "competent and suitable" to oversee preprimary education programs in the state. The three teachers (Soyinu, Dele, and Raphael) interviewed from an urban community are certified teachers, but not preprimary educators. They are qualified high school teachers and one is a retired elementary school assistant head teacher.

Two out of the three teachers (Adun, Dare, and Joseph) interviewed from a rural community are grade two teachers. They are qualified to teach at the elementary level while the third teacher is unqualified with a high school Diploma. All six parents ('Komi, Betty, and Yetty from an urban area and Fasa, Kemi, and Pekun' from a rural community) selected for this study have followed different career paths such as farming, teaching, trade, and medicine. Some have been involved as a preschool teacher, an administrator, or as a parent

in preschool education programs in Ondo State, while some have not been active in educational settings. In all, eight females and six males were interviewed for this study.

Due to the fact that the nature and organization of Nigeria's society is frequently based on kinship, with the community being synonymous with kindred, I decided to interview a group of traditional rulers in a rural community. In Ondo State, being a less complex society, the people are likely to be similar and have a strong belief in the traditions of their forefathers and the leadership roles of the traditional rulers. The living traditional rulers are respected and feared because they represent the dead deities and their instructions must be obeyed to the letter.

In justifying the numbers of subjects interviewed for this study, the main criterion that guided me was whether the goals of the research could be accomplished using the data obtained from the number of subjects I selected. Based on the quality of the interview data I collected, as well as my sense of its substantiality in providing a view of essential aspects of the phenomenon under investigation I would say the number of the participants is adequate. Also, certain criteria such as subject availability, the audience, the kind of insights to be highlighted, and the phenomenon to be portrayed guided the selection of the people interviewed for this study.

Community Selected for this Study

The rural community selected for this study is Iludun-Ekiti and according to the 1991 census it has a population of about ten thousand. This village has one high school, two elementary schools and one privately operated preschool which is headed by a retired elementary school teacher. Ninety-five percent of the people are peasant farmers while the remaining five percent are teachers, trade personnel, and traditional crafts people.

The urban community selected for this study is Ondo city. Ondo is the headquarters for the local government and has a population of about 148,000 people. This city has several institutions of higher learning, many high schools, and numerous elementary

schools. The number of approved nursery/primary schools in Ondo is about twenty with an additional twenty five to thirty five unapproved preschools. These two communities are located between longitude 4 degrees and 6 degrees East of the Greenwich Meridian. The physical features consist mostly of high land and a few lowland areas along the river courses. Some parts of the lowlands and highlands are covered with young and old sedimentary rocks. The climate of Ondo and Iludun-Ekiti is influenced by their location. Both are located in the tropical region which is affected by the south, rain bearing winds. The temperature of the area ranges between 75 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit with temperature ranging only 6 to 9 degrees throughout the year. There are two pronounced seasons in both communities. The dry season is from November to early March and the wet season is from late March to late October. The rainfall occurs mostly during the day and is always torrential and accompanied by thunderstorms. Between July and August there is a short break in the rainfall due to the movement of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone and the Inter-Tropical Front, which is as a result of the movement of the sun along the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. These two communities have humus, clay, and loamy soils which are ideal for forests. However, due to human activities most of the area has been deforested. Instead of forest, man-made Savannah and grassland predominate. The areas which have not been tampered with are covered with thick forests and tall trees.

The majority of the people in Ondo city and Iludun-Ekiti are farmers. In Ondo city, about 90% of the people are engaged in farming while at Iludun-Ekiti about 95% are engaged in subsistent farming; others are engaged in occupations such as trading, carpentry, arts and crafts, education, and medical services. Agriculture is pivotal to the economy of Ondo State and the two communities selected for this study.

These two communities, like other communities in Ondo State, share some characteristics that distinguish them from highly industrialized societies. These differences have vital implications for the appropriateness of research methods and the type of preschool education that are relevant within the two communities. For instance, the division of labor

is not as complex in terms of the number of distinct economic and social roles. Individuals occupy fewer social positions, each of which is less segmented and encompassing more of social life than in societies characterized by a complex division of labor. The traditional community is frequently based on kinship, the community being almost synonymous with kindred. Dwellings may be located according to kinship ties rather than occupation or income. Status, that is, access to power and privilege, is prescribed on the basis of location in one type of kinship organization or another. Certainly the sophisticated sampling procedures predicated upon the structural nature of Western society seem less applicable under these circumstances.

It is imperative to examine the demographic data and describe the traditions within these two communities because of their similarities to other typical villages and cities in Ondo State. This is also necessary to see whether the incorporation of preprimary education into the educational system will be relevant or of benefit to other communities and Ondo State as a whole. These two communities are typical examples of the villages and cities in Ondo State, perhaps with more similarities than differences. My first visit was to the Ministry of Education, Akure, where I read the documents related to preschool institutions in Ondo State and the provisions in several cities and villages before the selection of these two communities.

Views, Beliefs, and Aspirations about Preschool Programs

The voices of participants presented in this chapter have emerged from several interviews, and sometimes at least two conversations, per participant. These interviews took place in Ondo State, Nigeria between the months of June and August of 1994. The intent of the interviews and conversations was to explore the beliefs, views, and aspirations of the school administrators, preschool teachers, and parents about the present organization and administration of preprimary schools and the possible inclusion of preschools as part of the educational system in Ondo State. In an interpretivist inquiry of this nature, the

researcher needs to provoke the disclosure of participants' views in a sensitive way. Smith (1990) points out that the truth of a situation never reveals itself by itself but has to be provoked.

Some fundamental questions regarding the operation of preschools emerged to guide this study. For example, "How do you think preschool educational opportunities and accessibility can be made equal?" "How best can these opportunities be provided?" "What do you think about preschool education for children ages 3 - 5?" "Is there a need for both privately and publicly operated preschool education?" "Who should be operating preschool programs in Ondo State?" "Should preprimary education be made mandatory?" "Should it be available for all children in the state?" As we sough to provide answers to these and many other questions raised during the study, we came to a deeper understanding about different views and values that people hold on how best to operate preprimary education programs in the state.

Follow-up conversations were built on the previous interview with each participant. Also, themes which had emerged during the previous interview were analyzed, summarized and then given to the participants so that they had a chance to reflect on their previous thoughts and my interpretation of them. A brief overview of the discussion which led to each theme will be given at the beginning of each theme's presentation. The voices of the interviewees will be presented according to their positions on that particular theme.

The Development of Preschool Education in Nigeria and in Ondo State

The development of preprimary education in Nigeria and in Ondo State in particular have already been outlined and discussed in Chapters One and Two. The purpose of this section is not to repeat the same material or to provide a detailed historical development of preprimary education in Nigeria and Ondo State. Rather, this section will serve to supplement the factual material already presented by utilizing the voices of the participants.

The focus will be on their perceptions of the events which led to the development of preschool education in Nigeria and later in Ondo State.

Apart from the fourteen people interviewed, I also interviewed a group of the traditional rulers. Only four of these participants were able to say something about the development of preschool education in Nigeria and in Ondo State. As was pointed out in Chapter Two, the first education ordinance was promulgated in 1884 in Nigeria, creating an Infant Department. These infant classes were the fore runners of nursery schools in Nigeria. However, these infant schools were only located in the Government Reserved Area (G.R.A.) with only the children of the expatriates in attendance.

According to the Deputy Director of Education (Suyi), two forms of nursery education were introduced into Nigeria: the church based preschool and the private nursery schools. The church based preschool is a form of education given to young children in churches from the time Christianity was introduced into Nigeria. Private nursery schools are schools organized by individuals or communities in response to the social and economic demands of Nigeria. The church based preschool started in the form of Sunday School for very young children which took place on Sundays for about one hour. Attendance at these group varied from Sunday to Sunday, and the size of each group also varied. During my interview with Komi, he was quoting Kolawole (1989) that the early church based preschools could be said to be actually 'formal' schools in informal settings, with children of all ages attending.

Suyi further states that the Sunday School nursery class had become an extension of church programs, organized in the same way as nursery schools in the public sector. For instance, the classes were conducted from Monday to Friday, usually by young women with limited education, most of them primary school leavers. Children were admitted from both Christian and non-Christian families. Although the curriculum was secular in part, it was largely based on the primary objectives of the early missionaries of strengthening the faith through an understanding of the Bible and the doctrines of the

church. The school provided an opportunity for children who did not gain admission into primary classes to have an early start. It also served as a child-minding facility for parents who were busy at work on weekdays. The school was usually run on church premises, and the teacher was paid from the church funds.

"Generally speaking, private preschools began after Nigeria's independence in 1960", Suyi maintains. As a result of social and economic pressures from society, some private individuals and communities started to operate preschools, primary, and secondary schools. She also mentioned that "the demand for private schools by parents was largely due to their faith in education as the liberator of young child from ignorance and poverty." Obviously, this was a different objective than that of the missionaries. Parents thought that by giving such education to their children, the children would become a sort of social security when the parents become old. Yetty, states that private nursery schools do not enjoy any privileges from the government. Most of these private schools imitate foreign methods without any real understanding of their purpose.

It was pointed out by Suyi that before the federal government of Nigeria gave nursery schools a legal status in the National Policy on Education in 1981, there was a considerable increase in the public demand for more preschool programs, especially from middle class women at various levels of government, in various organizations, and from well-to-do individuals. Another reason for the demand of preschool programs was the break down of child rearing styles in Nigeria, which disrupted the "multiple mothering" and extended family structure system that had characterized Nigerian society. These two points were stressed by the interviewees.

Ondo State was born or created on February 3, 1976 with its capital in Akure. Its educational policies, as well as its operation, were based on those of the former Western States. Like all other states in Nigeria, it has since developed its educational policy and services for rapid development. Ondo State covers an area of about 20,595 square kilometers with the population of about five million people and twenty two local government

areas. Presently over 50% of the people live in the rural areas as peasant farmers. A brief overview of the population distribution according to the 1991 census is as follows: under 8 years old about 30%, between 9 - 17 years old about 25%, adults about 30%, and 60 years old or above 15%. Fewer than half of the preschool age children were attending any forms of preschool in September 1993. This implies that more than half of the preschool age children did not attend a preschool program or did not have access to such programs.

In my interview with Sarah, the Chief Education Officer in the preprimary section in Ondo State, I asked her about her views and knowledge of the development of preprimary education in Nigeria and later in Ondo State. The response was astonishing because she was considered an "expert" in preschool education. Now hear what she says:

> Of Nigeria, I may not be able to tell you anything. But as for Ondo State, I assumed this post in 1993, just last year. Because of the retrenchment and retirement of some officers, I could not find preprimary education files in the open registry. There is nobody in that registry, it has been closed. (18.7.94)

I found it difficult to believe that the open registry (very large office with storage facilities where documents are kept) in the State Ministry of Education could be closed down, bearing in mind that this is where important documents relating to educational matters for the whole state are kept. I suggested that maybe there was somebody else we could contact to open the office. She said the registry opens sometimes but not on all days and that she had searched the office without finding the files on preschool education. She said:

> But in the file I have, I found that Omolere Nursery Primary School in Ondo State started in 1967. Maybe people didn't know the value [of such programs], especially in the suburb areas. But because of the creation of state many people came from the then old western region, and because of the knowledge they had in Ibadan or Abeokuta or other places, these people knew the value of preprimary education. So they started springing up as from then. (18.7.94)

Sarah's assertion here is that the creation of Ondo State from the then Western State and the movement of the people to the newly created state was vital in the development of preprimary education in Ondo State. Ibadan, being the headquarters of the then Western State, is considered the largest city in West Africa and has several industries and

government establishments. Also Abeokuta, now the capital of Ogun State, was well developed in terms of civilization and education because of the early missionary activities in Abeokuta which later spread to other parts of Nigeria.

Suyi, the Deputy Director of Education in the Ondo State Ministry of Education, explains:

> Ondo State inherited five fee-paying nursery/primary schools in 1976 from the former Western State. Its educational policies, as well as its operation then, were based on those of the former Western State. Though very few programs were privately established after creation of the state, all the private nursery/primary schools in Ondo State were compelled to operate only nursery sections with the free education programs of the civilian government from 1979 - 1983. (13.7.94)

The civilian government, which came to power in 1979 in Ondo State under the umbrella of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), proposed free education at all levels as one of its four cardinal manifestos if voted into power. Therefore, education from primary to secondary school levels were free during the reign of the Unity Party of Nigeria in Ondo State. But the question still remained, why couldn't preprimary education be made free as well? Sarah, the Chief Education Officer, said that people were not aware of the importance of preprimary education at that time. Are the people aware of the need for the universal preprimary education now? How does the awareness influence their views, beliefs, and aspirations as to how preschool programs should be delivered in the state?

Further conversations with Suyi, the Deputy Director of Education in Ondo State, revealed that in 1984 the military administration which ousted the civilian government allowed the existing private nursery schools to run both nursery and primary sections. The number of privately operated nursery/primary schools rose to twenty-nine. Thus, the government allowed private individuals, as well as social and religious organizations, to establish private fee paying nursery/primary schools. In order to ensure a high standard and that proprietors of the schools met the guidelines and conditions laid down by the federal government, the preprimary education unit of the Ministry of Education was responsible for preprimary education in the state. According to the Deputy Director of Education, the

Ministry ensures quality control of the schools and distributes copies of guidelines on preprimary education and library books to the schools. The federal government has approved a uniform syllabus on preprimary education and the preprimary education section of the Ministry organized an induction course for teachers of private nursery schools. Suyi added that as of December 31, 1988, Ondo State had over ninety fee paying nursery/primary schools. By 1994 there were over 400 approved nursery schools in Ondo State; unapproved programs were scattered all over the state as well.

In summary, this section of the results and discussion outlined some of the interviewees' views and beliefs about the development of preschool programs in Nigeria and later in Ondo State. It was generally felt that prior to the National Policy on Education in 1981, which gave a legal status for preschool education, there had been a great demand for more preschool programs in the state, especially from the middle class women who were engaged in public work. The creation of Ondo State in 1976 was another factor and the exposure (nursery education and Western civilization) people had in Ibadan and Abeokuta before they migrated to Ondo State. Most of the participants interviewed agreed that preschool education in Ondo State expanded because of the strike actions of the public school teachers and the decline of the public education in the state. All these factors contributed to the development of preschool programs in Ondo State. However, little or nothing was mentioned about parental involvement, pressure groups, and other organizations in the development of preschool education in Ondo State. This might have led to an inequality of opportunity in the initial provision of preschool programs and resulted in elitism. Parents' apathy might be due to illiteracy and lack of information. At present, over 60% of the Nigerian population is illiterate and resides in rural areas where the rate of both economic and educational development are low compared with the cities.

However, any discussion of child care or preschool education in Ondo State or in Nigeria is incomplete without reference to the modifying and/or confusing influence of

external factors, especially the colonial experience and its aftermath, on the aforementioned socialization picture.

Incorporation of Preschool Education into Public Schools

> The success of any system of education is hinged on proper planning, efficient administration and adequate financing. Administration includes organization and structure, proprietorship and control, inspection and supervision. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, P. 35)

In Chapter Two, I outlined the organization and administration of preschools in Ondo State. This section of the study will examine the interviewees' view of the present organization of these programs and the possible incorporation of preschools into the public school system in Ondo State. The above quotation is the stand of both the federal and state governments on organization and administration of schools at all levels. The same idea was shared with one of the participants I interviewed for this study. She is currently a parent and a head teacher in one elementary school in Ondo city. When I asked her about preprimary education for children ages 3 to 5, she responded that:

> Preprimary education for children ages 3 to 5 or even ... from age 2, is a very nice program for children, ... if it is properly organized. (2.8.94)

Betty said that the success of preschool programs lies in its organization. School systems, and consequently their management and day-to-day administration, should grow out of the life and social ethics of the community which they serve. Consequently, the administrative machinery for either the state or national education system should be based on intimate and direct involvement at the local level with effective lines of communication between all the people involved.

In order to have an effective school system and good organization, the National Policy on Education categorically states that:

> a devolution of functions whereby the management of schools is placed in the hands of district school boards of management, the coordination, planning, financing, and direction of the total educational effort within the State is placed in the hands of the State Ministry, Department or Directorate of Education. (Fed. Rep. of Nig., 1981, P. 35)

The policy suggests that a cadre of staff is required at the different operational levels in the local, state, and federal institutions. The National Policy on Education in 1981 for the first time gave a legal status for preprimary education and the objectives are outlined in Section 2 of the policy. However, in the areas of financing and organization, the policy states that, "government will encourage private efforts in the provision of preprimary education" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, P.7). The policy also states that the

> Government will regulate and control the operation of preprimary education as well as ensure that the staff of preprimary institutions are adequately trained and that essential equipment is provided. To achieve these aims the appropriate level of government will review and enforce the educational laws which relate to the establishment of nursery schools to make sure that schools that are opened are well run and that preprimary teachers are qualified and other academic infrastructures provided. Ministries of Education will make regular inspections to ensure maintenance of high standards. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, P.7)

Presently, preprimary education in Ondo State is attached to the State Ministry of Education, with a preprimary education division which is headed by a Chief Education Officer. This division formulates policies, rules, and regulations as to how preprimary programs should be run in the state. In the area of organization and quality control, the policy states that:

> Once a private nursery/primary school is approved by the State Commissioner of Education, the school is automatically bound by the provisions of the Education Law, Cap. 36 or Laws of Ondo State of Nigeria, 1978 and therefore it is the responsibility of the Area Education Officer to visit the school regularly for quality control purposes. (Aina, 1990, P.117)

Komi, a parent and a professor of education in Ondo State, maintained that:

> Nobody has successfully ... taken the trouble to plan the preschool education at that level the way I personally feel it should be planned. (4.8.94)

Komi did not deny that the blueprint on preschool education was well written, but the problem lies in proper management and financing of the programs. He goes further to say that he had designed some learning packages for the proprietresses, proprietors, and teachers at this level; however, they think the packages are too costly and that they don't have the time to use them.

My conversations with most of the interviewees revealed that at present the government and the community contribute little or nothing to the organization and administration of preschools. This includes the day-to-day running of the programs and the quality control. Anyone reading the National Policy on Education and the State Regulations on Preschool Programs might wrongly assert that the government is actively involved in the provision and quality control of these programs, but is not true. Sarah, the Chief Education Officer of the Preprimary Section in Ondo State said:

> I don't think the community as a whole has much to say about the organization of private nursery and primary schools. I think it is the individual parents that contribute to the development of private nursery schools. (18.7.94)

The Chief Education Officer defended the government's organization of preprimary institutions. When I asked why the government collects N4,000 from each private school for inspection and registration without doing this job, her response was:

> I don't think that is right, because I am the officer in charge. We don't only collect money from these schools, we collect registration, inspection, and approval money and the school is approved and we visit the schools occasionally at least to monitor the qualitative aspect of the education. And if you go through the guidelines given to the proprietors and proprietresses of the schools, and if the schools are not run as expected, the letter of approval may be withdrawn. So we control the quality of the schools, we don't just collect money. I say we don't just collect money alone. (18.7.94)

I probed further and asked how often the ministry official visit these schools, and any unapproved schools that failed to meet the requirement in the past. She said:

> You know, the economic condition of the country, it is not favorable; most of our vehicles are grounded. So we find it difficult to monitor the schools these days, but if things go well as expected the schools should be visited at least once in a term. (18.7.94)

Suyi, and some of the people interviewed, believe that the problems with the organization and provision of preschool programs started a long time ago, that is, before the creation of Ondo State and still remains. All the interviewees agreed, except the Deputy Director of Education and the Chief Education Officer, that the state government worsened the situation

of preschool programs. One of the participants said, "If you can't give out, then why asking and receiving from the poor masses." However, the Chief Education Officer said,

> I have told you some of the constraints of this ministry ... most of our vehicles are grounded, and there are no funds to monitor these schools, though we realize that there are many mushroom schools, especially in the Akure local government. I wouldn't say that the control is effective right now, but we are making a proposal to make it effective. (18.7.94)

I think the view shared by Betty, a parent and a school head teacher in Ondo city, is relevant. She affirms that "the Ministry of Education has become a toothless dog that can only bark but not bite. It is rather unfortunate that preschool education programs could be left like that without any organization." Another interviewee voiced her belief about the policy that regulates the conduct of preschool programs in the state. Yetty's view of the policy and actual practices of preschool education is that:

> the government policy ... you discover that it says ... all citizens have equal rights, so just like the word egalitarian, it is a very "egalitarian" policy. But if we should go along with the policy, that means that preschool education should be free and available to every citizen. So it should not just be for the children of the rich. (15.7.94)

Yetty sees the policy from the point of view of equity and access of all the preschool age children. The point raised by Yetty is obvious; both the policy and the organization of preschool programs in Ondo State promote elitism and inequality. Yet Nigeria's Philosophy of Education is that there will be equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at all levels.

Apparently the involvement of the government in the organization and delivery of preschool education in Ondo State is very insignificant, perhaps the depth of government involvement occurs in the areas of regulations or policy formulation and collection of registration fees from these schools. The Chief Education Officer described the decision-making role being played by her Ministry/Department in the operation of preschool programs. She said:

> We play a decision role because in the preparation of the budget [Ondo State] and when they have to bring the nursery education into it. I am always invited to give my suggestion as to the fees to be charged ... [and]

> the condition to be maintained in the preprimary schools. So I will say we have a decision role to play. (18.7.94)

The decision making role played by the state government is obvious from the above statement. However, most of the participants interviewed agreed that because the government is not actively involved in the provisions of preschool programs, the private individuals who establish preschools capitalize on the attitude of the state government and mercilessly exploit both the parents and the children.

One of the participants interviewed, Dele, a preschool teacher was very emotional and disturbed about how the proprietors and proprietresses organize their schools. He said:

> The amount imposed by the school authorities should be regulated by the Ministry of Education so as to suit the pupils. ... Government should do something about it. I will say in my own opinion that those mushroom nursery schools who cannot afford to meet up with government laws ... should be virtually cut off. (8.8.94)

The same opinion was expressed by Adun, a one time head teacher of a rural preschool institution in Ondo State. She said:

> You see, government should not just allow these hungry proprietors and proprietresses to establish schools like that, because when you visit some schools you will see that they are not really following the policies, rather they are just after money. I think the best way to run these private schools [is that] ... first, the government should approve these schools before they are established, through physical presence and inspection. Also the government should make sure that schools approved should strictly follow the rules and regulations. (16.7.94)

Adun goes further to express her view on how to effectively organize preschool institutions:

> Before anybody can just have this school he [she] should be the person who has the knowledge, maybe study about preschool education or ...have the experiences of teaching for some years. ... Like where I taught before, ... I don't think the proprietor even studied anything like education or had a college education. I don't know the way she is even running the school now, and the teachers teaching there are not qualified. (16.7.94)

Adun concluded by saying that the government has a lot of work to do if private preschool programs are to continue. She also maintains that "preschool programs require more than the sole responsibility of the parents." Her conclusion provide little hope for establishing effective preschool programs as long as they are operated by private individuals.

According to most of the participants, one of the major problems confronting the efficiency of preschool programs in Ondo State is the lack of qualified teachers. The response of Sarah, the Chief Education Officer, to this problem is worth mentioning.

> It is better they [Ondo State] have programs where preschool teachers could be trained such as Montessori, ... it is good if they can introduce this. And I think there are preprimary education programs in some of our universities now. So, graduates of such programs can be head teachers of the school if they cannot have all the teachers undergo preschool education. If the head teacher has a good education, he [she] should be able to train the teachers locally on how to handle these children. (18.7.94)

Sarah's view is consistent with the stipulation of the National Policy on Education which emphasizes that teacher education will continue to have a major emphasis in all our educational planning because no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Section two of the preprimary education policy states that the government will regulate and control the operation of preprimary education; it will also ensure that teachers are adequately trained and that essential equipment is provided. The policy sounds perfect, but most of the interviewees agreed that it is only on paper and the practices of preschool programs in Ondo State for over two decades is far from this standard. Some said the organization is appalling, it lack uniformity and is substandard. The Chief Education Officer I interviewed explored other areas of preschool organization:

> Preprimary schools have a body known as Ondo State Proprietors and Proprietresses of Nursery and Primary Schools. And they meet once in a month; and [the] OMEP [World Organization for Young Children: translation from French] organization too, though people [proprietresses/proprietors] in the state are not willing to be members, the Ministry of Education has made it compulsory for all the proprietors and proprietresses to be members. So that is a forum too, where they can meet ... and they meet once in a month. (18.7.94)

Preprimary education programs in Ondo State at present are at crossroads, hence, an immediate government intervention is inevitable. Also the active involvement and the urgent intervention of various voluntary organizations in the realization of good, stable preprimary education programs in the state cannot be overemphasized. I personally attended some of the OMEP meetings during the course of this study. The first meeting I went to was fairly

well attended but the one I attended before I traveled out of the country had only three people, including myself, in attendance. The reason given seemed tenable; there was a political crisis in the country at that time as well as an acute shortage of petrol. However, there is still a need to lobby more individuals, voluntary organizations, and the state government in the delivery of preschool programs in Ondo State. My conversations with the Deputy Director of Education in Ondo State along this line was very fascinating. She foresees the need to incorporate preprimary education programs into the public education systems in Ondo State. She seems very optimistic and states how the organization would look and the possibility of its incorporation:

> Fortunately, the Primary School Management Board will soon start operating in Ondo State. Already there is a decree establishing the primary schools education board in all the states of the federation and by doing this the primary schools will be administered by the Primary Schools Management Board. And there are executive secretaries for [the] local government. These executive secretaries are for the control of primary education system in the local governments. Primary education will now be administered by the local government through a central body known as Primary Schools Management Board. If preprimary education is to be incorporated into the primary education system in Ondo State, it has to be incorporated through the Primary School Management Board. Each Local Education Authority in the local government now will be headed by an executive secretary who will be an educationist preferably a teacher of level ten and above. So with the establishment of the Primary School Management Board, as well as the local education authorities in the local governments, we can incorporate the preprimary education system into our educational system. So all you need to do is to brief the Primary School Management Board, ... the secretary [and] the Executive Chairman of the board of the need to incorporate preprimary education, into the primary education system in Ondo State. Then after that, you go down to the local government to brief the chairmen of the local governments even though the executive secretaries of the Local Education Authority are still being supervised by the central body of the Primary School Management Board, these secretaries are still subordinate to the chairmen of the local governments, the chairmen of the local government are their immediate bosses, so you brief the chairmen, this is the type of thing you want for the improvement of education in Ondo State. Then when you leave the chairmen, you go to the executive secretaries of the Local Education Authority, you brief them, let them see the advantages of incorporating the preschool into the primary education system in Ondo State. (13. 7. 94)

The Chief Deputy Director of Education briefly highlighted the structure of the educational system in Ondo State and explained how preprimary education programs could fit into the existing system. She opines that with the new structure of education it might be

easier to incorporate preschool program, such as the Better Life Day Care centers in Ondo State. She pointed out that:

> Fortunately each local government in Ondo State has Better Life Day Care centers, so you can start on this. With the establishment of the Better Life Day Care centers in the local government, they can build upon these day care centers and incorporate what is happening into the primary education system. So, they have been operating the Better Life Day Care centers [and] they have been providing the facilities for them, so right now it will be easier for them to supervise the preschool system together with the primary school system. The only thing is that they would need money. Because in a local government, you don't have more than at least five Better Life Day Care centers. So it is easy for the local government to finance the Better Life Day Care centers, it is easy for them to employ their primary health care nurses to the day care centers. (13. 7. 94)

The Chief Deputy Director of Education goes further to explain that if both the state and local governments are to cater to over 20, 30, 100, thousand preprimary schools in the local government, things seem to be more difficult, so the issue of finance needs to be examined. If the day care centers are incorporated into the primary education system, the local government will definitely need money. They will also need materials, even though the teachers are there, the primary teachers can teach the preschool pupils, but then they need to employ primary school attendants, or teacher assistants who will be taking care of the small children, so that has to be taken into consideration. She also added that, the incorporation of preschool programs into the educational system in the Ondo State should not pose any problem, since it is the local government that now handles the primary education system in the state, and these local governments have been handling the Better Life Day Care centers for the past four years. It will be easy for them to incorporate the preschool programs into the primary system.

The issue of finance is quite understandable, but I asked if the whole issue has to do with priority; and if the state government makes preschool education programs one of its educational priorities, perhaps the problem could be minimized. Because the Deputy Director is part of the education decision making body, she was very watchful of her utterances. However, she expresses her views and beliefs by saying, "It is a good policy if the government could make preschool programs its educational priority, it is a good thing,

but you have to convince the state government, that giving preschool education will be beneficial to the children" (13. 7. 94).

In summary, the majority of interviewees believe that preprimary education programs require more than the sole involvement of the parents. Most people said that the local and state governments and voluntary organizations should be actively involved in the organization and administration of preschool programs in Ondo State. Apparently the hope lies in a government that is ready to be actively involved in the running of preschool programs in Ondo State.

Views and Beliefs on the Importance of Preprimary Programs in Ondo State

> Education will continue to be highly rated in the national development plans because education is the *most important instrument* [italics added] of change as any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, P.6)

Section Two of the National Policy on Education outlines the purpose of preprimary education in Nigeria. This section of the study will concentrate on what the interviewees consider to be important aspects of preprimary education in Ondo State. Though there could be overlap in what the National Policy states as the purpose of preschool education and that of the interviewees, the interviewees' views and beliefs evolved from their day-to-day experiences and their involvement with preschool programs. The following sub-themes emerged from my interviews and conversations with the interviewees on the importance of preschool education programs.

a. Preprimary education affords parents (especially the mothers) the opportunity to work.
b. Preprimary education enhances both the intellectual and social development of children or what some interviewees call "sound education".
c. Preschool education serves as a preparatory program for formal schooling.
d. Preschool programs enhances a smooth transition from the home to the school.
e. Preschool programs are seen as a status booster.

f. Preschool enhances the child's adjustment to school.

g. Preprimary education encourages the development of self confidence in the children as the basis for a brighter future.

Preprimary education and working mothers. In my first interview with Fasa, a parent and a high school teacher, I was interested to know her views and beliefs about the importance of preprimary education from a parental point of view. When I asked her the question about why she sent her children to nursery school, she responded that:

> As a working-class parent, I expect them [the government] to help the parents. For instance, if I go to my work place and I leave these kids at home, who will take care of them? I will be at work, my mind will be at home. How do I contribute positively to my place of work or to be productive? So if there is anything like ... preschool education, I can easily put my kids there.... It is very important and also it is a good thing. (11.7.94)

Nigerian society today is quite different from the past when the working parents could rely on the assistance of the extended families for child care and welfare. The view expressed by Fasa is similar to Spodek et al.(1991). They argue that nursery school education allows mothers to work at least part time. Fasa concludes that the importance of this is not just economic but it is also has social implications, such as promotion of equal job opportunities among males and females.

Yetty, a parent and a teacher, sees preschool education as an inevitable program for working mothers because of the present economic and social trends in Nigerian society. So, when I asked her about her view on preschool education for children ages 3 to 5, she promptly said:

> Well, judging by the situation of things in the country now, being a mother and a career woman I cannot afford to stay at home all day and so the child has to go somewhere. In a situation where you don't have house help, then you have to look for a good place to place your child. That makes preschool education important. (15. 7. 94)

Yetty elaborated further on the above statement by saying that preschool education is not in itself important if the mother could stay at home, but if she is a working class woman then

she has to work. And while she is at work, she needs to have her child in a good place. She says this is why preschool education is necessary. She seems to acknowledge the importance of preschool education in relation to the working mothers. Another point to note about her views of a preschool program is the emphasis on "a good place" for a child. In our later conversations, she made it clear that the present private preschool institutions are "dumping grounds" for children of working parents. Though the words "dumping grounds" seem to portray a negative connotation or substandard institution, nevertheless the purpose is to provide care for the children of the working parents.

In another conversation I had with a group of some traditional community leaders, the issues of traditional beliefs and cultures were introduced as another perspective for viewing the role of preschool education. These traditional leaders unanimously agreed when Chief Obasa said that:

> No other place will care for these young ones when their parents go to work, both the fathers and the mothers. In the olden days, we used to have complete housewives, only the husband went to fend for the family. But nowadays, both the father and the mother are joint breadwinners. So, in the Yoruba custom we are bound to have children, because a childless family is a stigma in our society - a curse from god, so that is why it is very important to have these children in a conducive environment, that is why preschool education is necessary. (22. 7. 94)

The work required to maintain a household in a subsistence agricultural economy is notoriously arduous compared to that of industrialized, urban homes. On the other hand, as the traditional leaders explain, the work is widely shared. Complementary to the collaborative organization, a number of other characteristics of Nigerian traditional agriculture are well adapted to the incorporation of child care. Almost all of the individual tasks are self-paced; attention can easily be alternated between the demands of the task and those of a dependent child. Individual workers can usually perform their routines without close synchronization and without getting in each other's way. Chief Obasa maintains that in the Yoruba custom of Nigeria, children of varying ages usually helped their parents in their occupations; some children were even sent to apprentice with masters in specific trades. Whereas men specialized in animal husbandry, clearing and fencing farmlands, and

building dwellings, women focused on child rearing, food production and processing, house keeping and sometimes were successors of female seers or prophetess. Although the traditional political power was male-dominant, a few offices (e.g. "the queen of fertility") were reserved for women. However, women organized themselves into 'women houses' and their combined force during crises often overwhelmed and unseated even the most powerful male rulers. In indigenous medicine, divination, and prophecy, men and women were eligible for the same positions and social statuses, which were conferred on some children by birth or through prolonged apprenticeship.

Emotions about infertility among Yoruba (Ondo State included), as earlier stated by the group of traditional rulers I interviewed were strong. As opined by Chief Obasa childlessness was "felt by both men and women as the greatest of all personal tragedies and humiliations." One of the rulers said the desire for children was deeply rooted in the hearts of both men and women. Consequently, individuals, couples, and families spared neither effort nor resources to establish, restore, or prove fecundity. During cultural evolution, the Yorubas, like people everywhere, produced and sustained standardized strategies of survival for infants and children. These strategies reflected environmental pressures from a more recent past encoded in customs rather than in genes and were transmitted socially rather than biologically.

A history of child care or child education in Nigeria, albeit uncharted, would reveal that Nigerian mothers maintained a delicate balance between care giving, subsistent production, and housekeeping. In principle, a young child's education was a social enterprise in which parents, kin, sometimes neighbors and friends, and older children were active participants.

Following the introduction of Western technological and bureaucratic structures, the economies of African societies have generated a number of very different work settings into which increasing numbers of women and men have been recruited. Overtime, new arrangements for caretaking and the education of children evolved, thereby enabling

Nigerian parents to cope with the problems and pressures incidental to the profound cultural changes inherent in rapid social flux. The traditional rulers said that the new structures and practices, particularly of private preschool education programs in Ondo State, were too expensive for most of the parents. The work demands in new Nigerian settings are more regimented than those of traditional subsistence agriculture. Mothers, for instance, are expected to work in an office environment where the furnishings are scarcely compatible with the free movement of young children and there is no efficient way to feed them. It was suggested that the design of the workplace should be adapted to suit the prevailing patterns of social organization, especially for child education or care, rather than foreign packages. Nigerian mothers of young children wishing to participate in the urban economy have been confronted with an apparent need for the expensive private preschool institutions.

Preprimary education and children's intellectual/social development. Some of the participants in this study feel that preschool education contributes to children's intellectual and social development; these programs are seen as a ladder to sound education. A parent in a rural community said:

> It is very good for children to start school at the age of 3 or 2 because development begins soon as these children are born, they look at what other children are doing and this sharpens [improves] their brain, and they assimilate all that is being taught ... they learn more and it is less problem to the parents. (22.7.94)

Kemi sees the preschool as an environment where children can develop their potential. In the same vein, Piaget maintains that intelligence is influenced by the interactions children have with their environment (Bloom, 1976).

Adun, a one time preschool head teacher, says that children with preschool education are more knowledgeable than those without any:

> Education at this level [preschool] is important because a child who has been exposed to preprimary education will be more knowledgeable than a child who has just left his [or her] home at the age of five or six, and taken to the primary school. So, I think it really exposes the children to some of the things they are going to meet at the primary level, they know more about numbers. By the time they are in primary school they will be able to

> calculate some simple figures in math's, they will be able to read and write some simple figures; so I think it is very good and important. (16.7.94)

She says that many of her responses to my questions emanate from her personal experiences and interaction with children both at preschool and primary levels. She believes that preschool programs are a strong base for intellectual development. Another interviewee says:

> Children who attend preschool have the advantage of developing intellectually at an early stage. But those who don't attend such schools [preschool] may likely have some problem. Those who attended private preprimary schools will have an upper hand, those who didn't will be at the lower level. (26.7.94)

The view expressed above by Pekun was also shared by Suyi, an administrator. She says that preprimary programs "give quality education to the children in Ondo State." This view was widely expressed in this study by the interviewees, but sometimes from different perspectives.

Soyinu talks about the importance of preschool education and children's social development.

> In terms of social development, there are so many parents that have told me that their children relate very well with other kids, they enjoy sharing things and that these children even forced them to speak English.... Some of the parents told me sometimes that they were trying to dress for their children, and the children complained that ... the clothes have to be washed or this pant needs to be ironed. You know, this shows that these children are even educating their parents on how to take care of them. (20. 7. 94)

The opinion expressed above by Soyinu is relevant to one of the purposes of preprimary education. The National Policy on Education states that the purpose of preprimary education should be to teach good habits, especially good health habits, cooperation, and team spirit.

Preschool as preparation for primary education. One of the interviewees, Suyi, maintains that preprimary education:

> enables the children to be prepared for primary education. When they leave their parents' home, they still play about and get unsettled before the real education starts. (13. 7. 94)

Children are officially admitted into grade one at the age of six in Nigeria. So, most children stay at home with their parents until they reach the statutory age of schooling. But, with the economic and social change in Nigerian society, parents prefer to send their children to preschool programs if affordable. Most of the interviewees agree that preschools help children to prepare for the primary level of education. Yetty, a parent and a teacher, also shares this opinion, but she feels there must be proper organization in preschool programs if children are to benefit from them.

> But when you actually look at it, if preschool education is handled properly, I want to stress the word properly, then it could be very important in the preparation of the child for future school activities. (15.7.94)

Yetty believes that young children should learn through play. She says concepts and ideas are introduced to the child through a play approach. She feels this may not be understood, but that all the activities which go on at the preschool level are preparing children for primary school education. Adun expresses her views this way:

> Well, preschool education for children ages 3 to 5 is very good because it prepares the children for primary education. It exposes them to what they are going to meet when they get to primary school. (16.7.94)

Adun goes on to explains how preschool programs prepare children for primary school education:

> The role and objective of the preschool is to prepare the children for primary education. As we know, in the primary schools they are going to be exposed to some things, so in the preprimary school the child will already have been given the pre-knowledge of what he [or she] is going to know in the primary school .... The child will also recognize some things apart from preparing them for primary education, ... so these children now in preprimary schools will be able to recognize some figures before they go to primary school. Then they will be able to write these figures down, not recognizing them alone .... Again the children will be able to read. Where I taught before they have Nursery One, Two and Three. At the end of Nursery Three, before they get to primary school, they should be able to read simple books ... although they may not understand the meaning of everything. (16. 7. 94)

Sarah expresses her view about the importance of preschool programs by saying that the "major goal of preschool education is to prepare the children for sound primary education." To buttress her point, she compares children who attended preschool with those who don't

have the opportunity and concludes that children with preschool education, "are far better prepared for primary school than the children without nursery education."

Betty, a parent and a participant in this study, says preprimary education is very important because "It helps the children to develop their ability before they reach the real primary school." Kemi, a parent in a rural community, says, "It is good to start at that age [3 years], because that is the foundation of their education." Another interviewee, Pekun, also sees preschool education as the foundation of future learning.

> At that age they need to be handled with care and because they are future leaders of the country, they need an effective means to base their foundation on. (26. 7. 94)

In the same vein, Dele said that:

> In the first instance, one would just see that nursery school seems to be the foundation of education whereby it orientates our children or prepares them for the primary school level. (8. 8. 94)

Apparently, most of the interviewees in this study believe that one of the major purposes of preschool education is to prepare children for the primary level of education.

Preschool programs and transition from home to school. The National Policy on Education, as mentioned earlier, also states that preschool education should encourage a smooth transition from home to the school. A few participants in this study shared a similar view. Some of the interviewees expressed the pain their children went through during the first three months of schooling because they had not attended any form of preschool program. Some of these children stayed at home or went to the market with their mothers; others went to the farm with their father until age six. One interviewee said his boy preferred going to the farm rather than attending school. "The first six months of his school were tough and nobody knew what was going to happen." Adun expressed her belief about the importance of preschool education this way.

> Preprimary education caters for the gap between the primary education and the home in the sense that it gives a smooth transition from home to school. So by the time the children are ready for the primary school, they are more settled and more ready to learn. (13.7.94)

Adun shared with me her memory of her first week in primary school. She didn't attend preschool and she still remembers her fears.

> The children will be exposed to school life from the first year of their education in the school. They will be exposed to school life unlike myself. When I started primary school, at least in the first week of my primary school, everything was new to me. At that time we used to run away from the school, because everything was new, you see strange faces, you feared the teachers, the headmaster and everybody. (16. 7. 94)

She concluded by saying that children who attended preprimary programs did not experience so many things that were new for them. They would already be known and would understand routines. I told her that my experience was similar to hers. I started primary school at the age of six, but before that I went to the farm with my dad, played with the "greens", climbed trees, fished, and ate farm food and bush meat. I was excited about starting school, but at the same time the demands of schooling were frightening and unappealing. Teachers used corporal punishment no matter your age. Some of us thought that teachers were angels who never visited the washroom. In a nutshell, my first month at primary school was a hell. I didn't want to go to school because everything looked so strange and uninviting. At one stage I decided to leave school and become a farmer so that I could always eat good farm food and delicious bush meat without any teacher terrorizing me and demanding that I memorize things. The experiences were terrible and continue to linger in my memory. Perhaps if I had gone to a preschool program at the age of three, I might have felt differently about my primary school experiences. Who knows!

Preschool programs and adjustment at school During my second conversation with Adun, I asked her about her views regarding preschool education, she said,

> I didn't go to any preschool and I made it and so did other people. But we are in a modern world, the time is changing fast. Where I was conducting lessons in my home, I could see some differences between those who attended preschools with those who didn't attend. For instance, children without preschool experience may not be able to adjust fast when they get to primary school or whatever. (14.8.94)

Adun pointed out in our conversation that children without preschool education might eventually cope with primary school, but the problem might be in the area of 'fast adjustment'. She feels children with preschool education will adjust faster at the primary level. As a one time headmistress of a private nursery and primary school, she can talk from her own personal experience with children.

In the same vein, Pekun, a parent and a preschool teacher, believes that preschool education enhances children's adjustment to the primary school:

> For the preschoolers, when they get to primary school, they will be able to share things together [with others] freely. You see those children that didn't attend these preschool programs, at first when they get to primary school they may not feel comfortable sharing things with others because of lack of adjustment to the new environment. But if they have attended preprimary school they might have learnt something about thing and hence they will have no problem adjusting quickly to the new school environment. (26. 7. 94)

Preschool programs as a status booster. This theme might seem strange to someone from a society other than Nigeria. Two people talked about this theme. One parent said he sent his children to preschool because it was a shameful thing for him, as a farmer of prolific essence and a high chief of his village, not to send his children to preschool. Thus he felt he had to do this no matter what the cost. In the same vein, Yetty said:

> You know in the present Nigerian situation, preschool education is like a status booster. You tell people "my child is in this nursery school", even when you know that the child is not mentally or physically ready for such a place. Because St. Raphael pays [charges] one thousand and five hundred naira as school fees, and you want people to recognize you, then you say two or three of your children are there. (15.7.94)

Thus parents take pride by saying that their children attend one of the most expensive preschool programs in Ondo State. Maybe some parents send their children to preschool programs because it boosts their status in the society. This is an issue that will remain in the culture as long as individual's value status is adored.

Preprimary education and self-confidence. During my conversations with the interviewees, I learned that they felt one of the important aspects of preschool education was the development of self-confidence or self-esteem in the children. They said self-confidence would help children excel in their schooling and their future careers. In my conversation with Komi he said,

> Preschool education is a necessity. ... It is the age when high self-esteem and self-confidence can be developed in the young ones. (4. 8. 94)

Sarah maintains that preschool education encourages self-confidence in children and eventually this contributes to their future progress.

> It will enable them [preschoolers] to have self-confidence, because they are taught right from their formative age. So they grow up with confidence and it really brings out the talent we have in primary schools ... you will see that if you take the statistics of children going to higher institutions and good secondary schools, such as Naval schools and so on, you will see that it is the children from these nursery/primary schools. (18. 7. 94)

Apparently the demand for preschool education is high in Ondo State, and the interviewees feel preschool programs are important. Although there have been arguments about the standards of private preprimary schools, nevertheless, the interviewees still acknowledge that preschool programs are essential in today's Nigerian society.

Problems of Private Preprimary Institutions in Ondo State

Preschool programs remain a private enterprise in Nigeria. One would have thought that the legal status ascribed to the programs in the National Policy on Education would make preschools more accessible to the masses and perhaps enhance the quality, but the findings of this study revealed otherwise.

Since the National Policy on Education encourages private efforts in the provision of preprimary education, preschool education is seen as an investment for every proprietress/proprietor in Ondo (Awoniyi, 1988). If someone has the money to put up a shed and hire some people to teach there, they can set up a school. Hitherto in Ondo State preprimary school becomes a high-cost private enterprise for the children of well-off people.

Even though people in this study said preschool education is important, some of them said there are many problems with the private preschools. On the other hand, some of the interviewees said those important aspects usually occur in an ideal and well organized preschool. These are some of the problems of the private preschools mentioned by the interviewees.

1. They are too expensive/exploitative.
2. They lack qualified personnel.
3. Their programs are of poor quality
4. They lack good and sufficient structure/materials.
5. Their conditions of service (salary and wages) are extremely poor.
6. Their staff members are not stable.

In my first interview with Fasa, I asked her to share her views of any problems related to the private nursery schools in the Ondo State. She says:

> To be candid, I have my children there, we pay through our nose and it is highly competitive. A lot of bottle neck problems before you can get your children there especially in terms of payments. When it is not owned by the government it is a problem and there is nothing the government can do about it. That is, if owned by the government it would have been okay for we parents. (7. 11 . 94)

Fasa is a working mother and her husband is a lecturer in one of the higher institutions in Ondo State, so they belong to the middle class in Nigerian society. Despite their status, this woman still complains bitterly about the cost of preschool education -- she says "we pay through our nose." If the middle class complains about the high cost of preschool programs, then what is the fate of thousands of poor parents with preschool age children? Fasa is very critical of leaving the provision of preschool programs in the hand of private individuals and is an advocate for government take-over.

In the same vein, Suyi, the Deputy Director of Education in Ondo State mentions what she considered to be the major problem of private preschool education in the state:

> But the demerit [of private preschool] is that they are so costly. They charge high fees, that only the rich people can afford. Even the "poor

> people" [middle class] that send their children there manage to do so because the fees are so high. (13. 7. 94)

The 'poor people' referred to by Suyi could mean average or middle class parents. No poor family could afford to send their children to nursery school in Ondo State. The lowest fee per term start at N500.00, however, for most parents in Ondo State it takes three months to earn that amount. This is especially true for peasant farmers. Most of these farmers have large families; for instance, one of the interviewees has eight children, three of whom are of preschool age, and his total income per month is less than N500.00. How can such a parent afford the high fee in the private nursery school? Yetty pointed out during our conversation that:

> Like the funding, because it is normally private, it makes it a very heavy burden on the parents because the school fees are usually very, very exorbitant. (15. 7. 94)

Most interviewees see preschool programs as a necessity because working parents have to keep their children in a safe, conducive environment while at work. Thus Adun concludes that:

> You see that some of these people [proprietress and proprietors] are normally conscious that they just want to make money, they are not after what they are going to give to the children or the progress of the children. They are just there to make money. So I think this one should not be so. (16. 7. 94)

One interviewee maintains that most of the nursery schools in Ondo State are a "dumping ground" for the children of the working mothers. It seems that what really matters to the proprietresses and the proprietors is their fees. They see preschool education as an easy money-making investment.

Betty, a parent, didn't see why these schools should exploit the parents. They don't have qualified teachers and their program is irrelevant. Another parent who participated in this study also expressed her view about private nursery school most especially in regards to the issue of trained and qualified personnel.

> It is not encouraging the way that the teachers are employed in these private preprimary schools. These teachers are not qualified, they are just

> exploiting the parents for nothing and even what they think they are teaching them is not what they should give to these little children. (2. 8. 94)

Soyinu is a proprietor of a private nursery school in Ondo town. He also feels that high fees are a big problem of private preschool institutions.

> In some of the private nursery schools, you know, we have unqualified teachers and some of the proprietors [or proprietresses] demand so much more than necessary, whereby some of the parents are scared away, because of the money. They are money conscious. You see, if the proprietors and the proprietresses can consider the parents and consider the children as a whole, the financial obligation will be minimized, and therefore encourage the parents to send their children to the school. (20. 7. 94)

I asked him whether, as a proprietor, he ever considered himself exploiting the parents because of how much he charges parents who patronize his school. He attributes the "woes" of private nursery schools in Ondo State to the economic situation of the country. He maintains that the state and local governments are not contributing anything to the nursery schools; instead, the owners are made to pay high amounts for registration, licenses, and renewals every year.

I noticed that some of the participants I interviewed have different views on this issue. Kemi says:

> I cannot say I am satisfied with the way private nursery schools are being run in the state because of the school fees, it is every time they put it up [increase the fee]. That is why I am not satisfied and I think it is because of what is going on in the public schools, that is why it is going up like that [fees]. (22. 7. 94)

Kemi makes reference to the public schools as the reason why school fees have been constantly increased in the private preschool institutions. Another interviewee explains further the need for the increase in the school fees. He claims that teachers are not stable in the private nursery schools because of the poor salary, to solve this problem of instability of staff, the fees have to be increased in the course of time. According to Raphael, "it is not the fault of the proprietors and the proprietresses, they know these things and increase the fees in order to satisfy the teachers."

Another perspective about the problems of private preschool institutions in the state was expressed by Komi :

> The first problem is that because these schools are private, they are not sufficient to absorb all the pupils that would have loved to get in and that led to competition and survival of the fittest, depriving a lot of children the opportunity of having the right type of education .... The second problem is that because of that competition, the proprietors of such institutions now profit, so, some increase their fees to drive people away, some increase their fees to give the impression that the performance is better in their school, many of them engaged in window dressing, when you go to the walls of some of the schools, you see different pictures that will give you the impression that a child just looking at the walls alone will learn before the end of the day. But when you get in, you discover that the quality is not there. (4. 8. 94)

Having identified problems of inaccessibility, unhealthy competition, profiteering, and window dressing as the major flaws that beset these schools, Komi gave reasons why these proprietors and proprietresses profiteer. In his opinion, the whole system is "an absolutely elitism ideology."

For instance, Komi mentions the problem of favoritism in private nursery schools:

> Another problem I observed is that, because of the same competition, there seems to be a kind of favoritism in selection. They [preschool institutions] want to pick the children of people who will be able to pay, who will donate when they have a project, who will be able to give thousands. The child of the one who cannot afford to give thousands may be left out. This is a disadvantage. (4. 8. 94)

Continuing in the same vein, Pekun, a preschool teacher and a parent in a rural community, expresses her views by saying,

> I am not quite satisfied because the proprietors or the proprietresses of these nursery schools monopolize their schools to charge exorbitant prices and the people who know the value of this education will try hard to pay these fees even though the money is very high [difficult] to get but they will just try to get the money and pay the fees. So, the founders of these private nursery schools cheat people a lot ... they are good cheaters. (26. 7. 94)

Pekun was very emotional and dissatisfied about the way preschool founders exploit the parents. He remarks that even though people realized the importance and need for preschool programs in Ondo State, that shouldn't be a reason why the institutions should become a business venture for the few well-to-do individuals.

The interviewees mentioned large class size in the nursery school as a reason for lack of supervision. For instance, Fasa says:

> There is no serious commitment or supervision ... they [nursery schools] have up to 50, 60 pupils in a class. How do you ... expect the teachers to cope with that huge number? (11. 7. 94)

She goes further to explain more reasons why she is dissatisfied with the operation of private preprimary schools in the state:

> These private institutions exploit parents too much. When my first child started they were paying six naira but now they pay one thousand naira and above. Apart from this they will promise us that they will give textbooks, later on they will say buy this and buy that and they have other ways of getting money from parents. I could remember one time we had a Parents' Teacher Association meeting, they said the parents should pay a token amount for development which we had already paid with the school fee. We decided in that meeting that we should pay it per parent, later on they made it compulsory that each child should pay, which is not good. You know these private institutions I don't like the way it is [they are] being paddling, it is a quick way of getting money now in the state. If you see all the nooks and corners of Ondo State now, walking along the streets, you will get one or two nursery schools, so in that aspect they are just getting money but in return it is nothing to write home about. (11. 7. 94)

Every participant interviewed in this study expressed his or her concern about the discrepancies of the private nursery/primary schools in Ondo State. For instance, Fasa identified unreasonable and unmanageable class size in the nursery schools, their exploitation and diplomacy, and the uncontrolled way private nursery schools have been mushrooming in the state.

During my second conversation with Yetty, she made it clear why she is displeased with private preschools in the state. According to her, most of these private schools lack a hygienic environment and they operate in choky classrooms that are not conducive to learning. She also says some of these nursery schools operate in sheds with roofs that leak during the rainy season. At other times, the children have to stay under the sun which is not healthy for them.

Adun had experience as a head teacher of a private nursery school in a rural community.

> Well, the first problem I could see is the problem of site. They kept the pupils under the shed. By the time a teacher is in this class teaching the pupils, the noise will be disturbing the other classroom. So this really affected the teaching in the classroom. There were not enough materials. These pupils are very young, so we should not just be giving abstract teaching to them. They should be exposed to some of these things practically. Even we couldn't get enough classrooms for the pupils so there were about 65 pupils in a class. (16. 7. 94)

From the information gathered, the average classroom size in these private nursery schools ranged between 65 to 70. Some of the classrooms were described as "choky", and were in sheds without any facilities or playgrounds. Betty, a parent in this study, had no option but to withdraw her child from the private nursery school. She said,

> When I went through my child's work, the daily work after coming from the nursery school, I observed he was just performing mess. I had to withdraw him. There was no supervision in the school, the classroom was over populated. About 60 or 65 in a class. (2. 8. 94)

Apparently most of the problems in the private nursery schools are not hidden from the Ministry of Education officials. This fact was acknowledged by Sarah, the Chief Education Officer in charge of preprimary schools in the state. During our conversations she said,

> The problems facing privately owned nursery and primary schools are accommodations and location of their schools. And since the majority of the parents are not mobile, that is, they don't have vehicles, it is a problem if the school is not located where they can easily walk; the attendance will be poor. And that will be a problem for the proprietor [or proprietress] because if there are only few enrollment, then, where will the proprietor [or proprietress] get the money to pay for the government renewal fees. And to get teachers in these private schools is not easy because the proprietors and the proprietresses will not be able to pay government salary to the teachers and the allowances, like transport allowance, rent subsidy, and so on. Again, some teachers use these private schools as a "stepping stone" pending the time they will secure a permanent job with the public schools. Therefore, most of these private schools do not have stable staff. (18. 7. 94)

Other interviewees also mentioned proximity as a factor they would consider before choosing a preschool institution for their children. A poorly located school would probably not have enough children to secure land or a house. In a densely populated area, it could be expensive as well. Some interviewees believe that most private preprimary schools are located without considering the needs of the society but what is convenient for the founders at the time of establishment.

Another factor which compounded the preschool's problem is the instability of their staff, as mentioned earlier by the Chief Education Officer. Some interviewees believe that no teacher wants to stay any longer than necessary with the private schools because they are not well paid and they don't enjoy the same benefits with their counterparts in the public schools. One interviewee said,

> As a teacher and human being, I need money to care for my sons and my family. If the pay were more in the privately owned schools, I wouldn't mind working there. The salary of the government is regular and higher. Why do I need to go to private institutions where they don't pay their teachers regularly? (11. 7. 94)

Fasa also remarks on the deplorable condition of the teachers in the private institutions in Ondo State. She said,

> The payment in the private schools is not regular despite the huge amount they collect from the pupils. Hence the future of the teachers there is bleak. So I wouldn't like working there. (11. 7. 94)

The views expressed by Fasa above was also shared by Adun.

> When you are working in private nursery school, you see that the way the employer treats you is not good at all. Even the condition of service is not good, so nobody wants to stay there for long. (16. 7. 94)

Fasa introduces another issue which is the lack of respect shown to staff members.

> The respect is not there, [in private nursery schools]. As a married person, if I am working with any privately owned school, they will just treat me like any person. I wouldn't like that, I cannot tolerate that, I deserve my own personal respect. (11. 7. 94)

I asked her to elaborate further. She said that in our culture, married women are required to be accorded with some respect and dignity in the way we should talk to them, the language we use, how the head teachers supervise or control them. In the culture, married people are well respected because they are responsible individuals with family and therefore, they should "not be treated like an ordinary dog or something you purchased in the market."

Based on his experiences in the rural communities, Dare expresses the problems confronting privately owned preschool institutions.

> The nursery schools encounter the problem of instability of teachers, especially the graduates, or the N.C.E. [National Certificate on Education], so that is the problem they have in all the nursery schools, ... except if they

> are fortunate to have all those retired teachers or other less qualified teachers ... no respect from the parents, sometimes we tell them that they should come and collect their children at 3:30 p.m., they won't and at times we stay here till five o'clock. (12. 8. 94)

Dare sees negligence of the parents as a lack of respect for the teachers. I asked him what the school authority is doing about the lateness of the parents to pick up their children. He says the issue has been discussed several times in the staff meetings but the head teacher is yet to raise it at the Parent/Teacher Association meetings.

Some of the interviewees also express their concern about the lack of uniform and effective organization in these private nursery schools. One interviewee, Joseph, says:

> Quality control is not easy to have in private schools because it is the authority [proprietor/proprietress] who will recruit the workers and this one is based on the financial viability of the parents. Teachers are not stable, there is no balanced salary structure and the viability of any school here depends on the students population and the financial background of the owner. So I will say that quality control is not possible. (12. 8. 94)

Joseph is teaching in a private nursery school in Iludun-Ekiti. The view expressed above is quite similar to that of the Chief Education Officer. According to Sarah, as long as the provision and quality of the private school is based on the financial background and viability of the owner, the quality control and organization will remain unstable and substandard in Ondo State.

Joseph points out his view of the weak supervision in private schools

> And the government taxing the private schools year in year out, even their schools [public schools] they cannot control talk less of the private schools; so their own belief is to collect money and go away, they give us nothing. ... I think in this way they [Ministry of Education Officials] are trying to impose hardship on these schools. (12. 8. 94)

Continuing in the same vein, Dele, a teacher in another private nursery school, expresses his disappointment in the role being played by the Ministry of Education officials and tries to justify why most private schools charge exorbitant fees.

> The Ministry of Education seems as if it is not supporting the nursery schools. Like my school, the authority says one time that she is paying a certain amount of money to the Ministry of Education every month and this money has to come from somewhere. Maybe that is the reason why she is imposing a very high and exorbitant fee so as to bridge the gap of the money that is to be paid to the Ministry of Education. (8. 8. 94)

Dele remarks that the role being played by the Ministry of Education makes the provision of preschool programs more accessible to children of well-off parents. "Rather than making things easier for the private operators, the Ministry of Education complicates issues", he concluded. Most of the interviewees also assumed that in order for the private operators to pay the annual fees charged by the Ministry of Education they have to charge exorbitant fees to parents. One interviewee said, "this is the root cause of exploitation of parents by these private nursery schools."

Another major problem confronting private nursery schools in Ondo State is the lack of trained and qualified teachers. The only qualified teachers found in these private schools are either grade II graduates or National Certificate of Education (NCE) holders. However, these teachers are only trained to teach at the elementary and high school levels, not at the preschool or kindergarten level. According to the information gathered from both the Ministry of Education and the schools, more than 60% of the teachers in private schools never received any form of teacher education. They are mostly high school graduates.

> When you look at some of the staff in these private nursery schools you get a bit frustrated, because some of them are school certificate drop-outs, some don't even reach the school certificate level, but because they will take one hundred and fifty naira per month the proprietors [proprietresses] will hire them. Some of them cannot even speak good English; so right from the onset they help you to destroy your child because if a teacher says "you have went yesterday", and the child comes home and you correct the child and he/she says "that's what the teacher told me." (15. 7. 94)

Yetty goes further to explain what it means to be a qualified teacher rather than being trained but not qualified to teach at a particular level. She says it is one thing to be trained, and it is another thing to be qualified. If someone has a degree in Mathematics, that does not make him or her a teacher. So in a situation where you hire somebody to teach because he or she can communicate in English, but this does not mean they are qualified to teach young children. She concluded that most of the teachers in the private schools are either not trained or trained but not qualified to teach at the preschool level. A similar opinion was shared by Adun.

> Presently in Ondo State, because where I taught I could see that some of the teachers are not trained to be there. At the same time, I don't think there is anything we can do because if you have to wipe out all these teachers now, there will be nobody there to teach. (14. 8. 94)

The question now is do we let unqualified teachers teach preschool children? It might be difficult to "wipe them out", and maybe we won't get another set of teachers. This issue still remains unsolved. Adun maintains that as long as the preschool education program is in the hands of private individuals the problem remains unsolvable. Because individual proprietors organize their school the way they want, even the government directives about preschool provision are ignored.

My conversations with Komi revealed the view that parents' involvement in the running of private schools could change things to a greater extent. He cited his own experience with other parents in a private nursery school which one of his children attended. In one of the Parent/Teacher Association meetings, he said he was very critical about the way the head of the school was hand-picking untrained teachers, yet charging parents a huge amount of money. He made it clear to the founder of this school, and other parents at the meeting, that they should withdraw their children if there weren't changes made to improve the school. Komi says even though the founder of the school was very angry, he later realized that the criticism was meant to provide direction for a better future. Komi then concludes that:

> Whereas in the past it was high school graduates that were being hired because they can take any salary or just anything to keep body and soul together. Obviously, you don't expect such a person to perform to the best. But the situation changed after the parent teacher meeting. (4. 8. 94)

Komi goes further to say that most private schools in Ondo State will continue to hire untrained teachers as long as nothing concrete is done to discourage this practice. He gives some reasons why most founders of private schools prefer to hire untrained teachers:

> I have mentioned earlier on that they employ low quality teachers, because of the profit-oriented nature. They employ teachers who will say, "Yes sir, always!" If you are that type of teacher who will say, "Excuse me sir, I want to use a diagram tomorrow." you might be in the bad book of the proprietor [proprietress] because you asked to make money available. I had

> the experience while I was a secondary school teacher. They said, "You are always asking for apparatus." (4. 8. 94)

The issue of availability of apparatus raised by Komi became a topic of our discussion for a while. I asked him whether the schools must look elsewhere for materials before they can function effectively or do teachers have to buy all the materials they use in school? Komi said he doesn't believe that teachers should look elsewhere for apparatus, neither do they need to purchase everything; because there are lots of materials in the local environment that teachers could adapt. "Teachers need to improvise, be creative and resourceful. I think this is one of our major problems in Nigeria, we all want the authority to make everything ready for us to use, we don't want to make an extra effort to make things work. I think we should change our attitude in that direction", he concluded.

Some of the interviewees identified other problems facing the private schools, such as the substandard programs and preschool programs that are too academically oriented. Adun said,

> It was a real problem for teachers to impart learning into them. We just teach as if they are in higher institutions, we just teach them, and just ask them to copy down. Then you just mark. You couldn't get enough time to deal with each pupil's problem because of the problem. (16. 8. 94)

I asked Adun what she did as the head teacher to correct these mistakes in her school. She said there was nothing she could do because the problem came not only from the teachers, that they were following the directives of the school proprietor. She said,

> Let me cite an example of where I taught. It seems that the children are not exposed to extra curricular activities, it is only academic, unlike the public schools where they have to do other things like games and attending social gatherings. (16. 8. 94)

According to Adun, they were trying to show the parents that they were doing a lot of academic work at school. In her opinion these children were in a stage where they should be learning through play rather than rote learning. She said if a lecturing approach was used "more harm could be done to them rather than learning." Betty said the teaching in the private schools is not child-centered:

> These proprietors [proprietresses] are just building up schools, just setting up schools for their own daily bread. They are so egocentric that they don't think about the children. There is no child centered education; they just want to have the money and nothing, nothing for the children. (2.8.94)

Betty explained why she thinks children don't benefit from being in private nursery schools.

> Preschoolers don't benefit because of the way they teach them. It 's all rote learning; memorize, memorize, and memorize. (2. 8. 94)

Another interviewee mentions similar things. Even though her own children are fond of memorizing "jargons" in the private school they attend, she does not approve of the practice. About three interviewees identified communication, which is mostly in English in the private schools, as imposing both a foreign culture and an unfamiliar language on little children. My conversations with parents, teachers, and administrators revealed that there are mixed feelings on this issue. Some parents send their children to private nursery schools so that they can learn how to speak English. Therefore, when their children start to speak English at age 3, the whole family is proud. Other parents want their children to learn English as a second language, but prefer the mother tongue to be the major medium of learning in preschools. One parent says, "to impose foreign language on a people is simply to impose the culture of the impostor", because you cannot divorce a language from its culture. Suyi said,

> This type of preschool education is artificial, because they train the children in foreign language. Our National Policy on Education stipulates that the children in the preprimary and primary schools should be taught in their mother tongue. An experiment has been carried out to support this. But they feel, because they are in nursery school, they should train their children to speak in English or French or German and so on and so forth and with little emphasis on the mother tongue. So as a result of this, these children can speak foreign languages, but they don't speak their own language as fluently as they are supposed to. (13. 7. 94)

The point raised by Suyi is in accord with the preprimary education Section 2 in the National Policy on Education :

> Government will ensure that the medium of instruction will be practically the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end will develop the orthography for many more Nigerian languages, and produce textbooks in Nigerian languages. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, p. 7)

As long as the provision of preschool programs remains exclusively in the hand of private individuals, the enforcement of the above blueprint might be impossible or, as one interviewee said, "only magic can change this."

Komi also expresses his dissatisfaction with the poor etiquette of both the preschoolers and the staff of most of the private schools.

> I also observed that in some privately owned nursery schools you will discover that the moral standard cannot be guaranteed because we always want to believe that moral is a thing that you grow up with, but I see moral as a function of educational level. There are things we can do at the primary school which by the time you finish secondary school you will never do because we will want to see ourselves as above that. So when the caliber of teachers is poor, the moral and standards may also be poor. For example, a teacher who himself [herself] cannot use a fork and knife may not be in the best position to train the pupils to use a fork and knife. A teacher who has not been using a water closet toilet may not be in the best position to teach the child how to use such a thing. So there are so many tiny, tiny things that make a decent personality which might be lacking in a privately owned school. (4. 8. 94)

What I discovered from my conversations with the interviewees is that one problem leads to another. Some interviewees commented that it should not be surprising that what operates at the elementary and high school levels is being reproduced at preschools. A parent from the rural community, after expressing her dissatisfaction with the private nursery schools, concludes that:

> What I think about the whole issue is that only God that can help in this situation. You know we have some children, they have the knowledge but there is no money to sponsor them. What I believe is that if such children continue like that God can still render the help, but how long He will do it I can't tell. (20. 7. 94)

Some of the interviewees expressed their hope and optimism in God. Perhaps when the road is tough and the situation becomes unbearable, people turn to God or religion for divine solutions, which may be why it is often said that religion is the opium of the people.

Advantages of Privately Operated Preprimary Schools

A participant in this study says "there is nothing with disadvantages without advantages." I told her that I share a similar view that everything that has its disadvantages

will have some advantages because we are not in a perfect world, therefore nothing is absolutely perfect. Most of the interviewees affirm that preschool education programs in the hands of private individuals suffer more disadvantages than advantages; nevertheless, some of the participants acknowledged the inherent advantages of the private nursery schools. It is very fascinating that what some consider to be problems in private schools, others see as advantages, depending on the situations, motives, and explanations given by the schools on certain issues and developments. For instance, some interviewees claimed that private nursery schools are more organized and efficient than the public schools. One interviewee says that because it is private there is thorough supervision in most of these nursery schools. Another participant considers these private schools to be more efficient, organized, and stable:

> Private schools always have an upper hand over the public ones because the private schools seem to be more organized than the public schools especially in Nigeria, not only in Ondo State. But in the case of Ondo State, it is peculiar, I am sorry to say in the sense that at the slightest little discomfort, the Ondo State teachers believe that they should go on strike. (4. 8. 94)

At the time I was conducting this study in Ondo State, the public school teachers had been on strike for almost two months. Hence, most of the interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction at the way the public school teachers go on strike at anytime. This is probably why the participants see private schools as more stable and efficient. Komi goes further to say that:

> Another advantage of the private schools is that they are not amenable to unpredicted changes which happen in the public schools. Today the government will give an edict ... all teachers that are N.C.E.[Teacher Diploma graduates] should go back to school for degree certificate, therefore, their schools will be depleted, in consequences children will suffer. (4. 8. 94)

To buttress his point he noted the crash inservice programs for the secondary school teachers in the state as a good example. He says the program looks good, but it has a bad side, the teachers who are in this program attend for four weeks and the government will not provide a replacement. As a result the students in the school will suffer for that period, and when the teachers come back they will start the new syllabus for the year instead of starting

from where they stopped before their inservice course. He concludes saying, "you discover that people pay for education and they get less just like the implication of student riot." The aforementioned problem, according to Komi, will not happen in the privately owned schools because they operate a stable system; when they find the need to remove a teacher, they normally get a replacement and they seem more organized than the public schools. Though the reverse should be the case, he opined. Another advantage of privately operated preschool programs is what Komi calls:

> The "syndrome of hire and fire", which has a very positive influence on the stubborn African mind; believe that or not! The headmasters in the public schools cannot sack the teachers in their schools. In fact, there are some of the teachers that are capable of sacking the headmaster. So they do whatever they like, they leave the school to sell their wares, they perpetrate all sorts of atrocities and if the headmaster says anything they will say, "you will be transferred if you are not careful", and many of them succeed in doing it. That cannot happen in the privately owned schools because the proprietor [proprietress] has the authority and you cannot go to the Ministry of Education and say I want to sack my proprietor [proprietress], it is just impossible and for that the proprietors [proprietresses] are feared and the teachers work hard. (4. 8. 94)

Komi concludes that the fear of hire and fire (that is, if I hire you I can fire you anytime if you don't perform) seems to make the private school a kind of consolidated system. Komi further says that the so called "hire and fire syndrome" could also be abused by the individual school leaders because power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Suyi, an administrator in the Ministry of Education, also believes that the privately owned preschools are not without some merits:

> These privately operated nursery schools do not have an unusual break [strike action] in their school session, like the public schools. The education system is smooth, they are not disturbed by incessant strikes of teachers. Whether there is strike or no strike in the public sectors, the nursery school teachers go to their schools, because these are not government schools. One other thing is that most of these private schools have transport by which they transport their children to and from the school. (13. 8. 94)

Sarah, the Chief Education Officer, also shares a similar view especially now that the public schools seem unstable as a result of industrial actions of the teachers and the political situation in the country.

> What I think that has really helped them [private schools] is the strike actions of the public schools teachers. The children in the public schools go to school only three months or four months in a year, whereas nothing is interrupting the schooling of the children in private nursery and primary schools, so this has really created awareness for the people of the state to take their children to preschools. (18. 7. 94)

Several of the interviewees mention the same point as an advantage of the privately operated preschool institutions in the state. However, the same reason led to the unprecedented mushrooming of nursery schools in Ondo State as well. Maybe it is the same reason why some participants in this study believe that private schools are more standard or "they teach sound education" as some put it. Adun also shares her opinion about what she considers good in the private schools:

> Private school is good because I am really interested in the way they plan their day-to-day activities. Also the quality of the education given to children is better, because when I was teaching in private school, I learnt a lot, they really prepare children for the future. Parents have confidence in some of these private schools that at least they are going to give their children something worthwhile. (16. 7. 94)

Dele, a preschool teacher, also believes that the privately operated nursery schools have some significant advantages which are worth mentioning. Those advantages, according to him, could be identified in the areas of providing "initial and sound education" for children. Both teachers and children are more disciplined in the private schools than in the public schools. He added that although the teachers' salary is small compared with the public school teachers, the private schools pay their teachers promptly, therefore, these teachers are much more effective and hardworking.

At this juncture, I made a comment during my conversations with Dele that it might be difficult to arrive at a conclusion that private nursery schools are better than public schools because presently in Ondo State there is nothing like public nursery schools with which to compare. Initial education or preparatory education could only be offered to children by the privately owned nursery schools. Therefore, we don't have the public ones with which to really compare or perhaps compete.

Most of the working parents that I interviewed in this study believe that the privately operated nursery schools are serving the purpose of at least keeping their children while they are at work. This enables parents to make ends meet during this economic hardship in the country. Yetty said that,

> Talking about the positive things about private nursery schools, you discover that at least it gives the average working class peace of mind, that you have a place to dump (I will use the word dump) your child in the morning then around two in the afternoon rush back to collect the child, then come home with the child. So that is one of the things that keep the children busy, and it actually prepares them for work in the future. (15. 7. 94)

Yetty elaborates more on the above point by citing her son as an example. She says that her son is now reading comic books and magazines because of the little exposure he had in the private nursery school which gave him such an opportunity; and that children in the rural area will play with sand or roam the street. So, these are some of the advantages of the privately owned nursery school, she concluded. Another interviewee shares a similar opinion.

> Apart from academic benefits, the parents have to go to work maybe every morning, private schools serve as a place where they can keep their children till they return from their working place. So this saves them from the problem of looking for where to keep their children when they are at work, and that is another benefit of these private nursery schools. (14.8.94)

As long as only privately operated nursery schools serve this custodian purpose in Ondo State, parents will consider it a better opportunity than having no place for their children.

Another advantage mentioned by some interviewees is that privately operated preschool programs offer a better opportunity for the children in their future educational pursuit.

> If you see the results of the Common Entrance Examination into secondary schools in Ondo State, the type of children that get admission into these model schools, those that top the list when they conduct this examination, they are children that had undergone preprimary education in the private schools. So, these are the children that the government is now proud of. (14. 8. 94)

In my conversations with the Chief Education Officer, I was interested to hear her views about the advantages of privately operated nursery schools in the state. She says:

> The benefits of the private nursery schools especially in Ondo State are very glaring, we wouldn't have got candidate for the federal secondary schools if not for the existence of private nursery/primary schools. Their teachers don't go on strike, they have regular year of schooling, and children from these nursery schools perform very well, so we can fill our quota in the federal secondary schools. I think it is good that all children in the state are not stagnant as a result of teachers' strike. (18. 7. 94)

I asked her whether she had children attending public primary school. She was reluctant to speak about it right away, but later she said none did at present. She said that she withdrew her children (two) from the public school and put them in a private nursery/primary school when the teachers' strike became incessant. The Chief Education Officer says there is little or nothing her department can do when it comes to the issue of teachers' strike in the state, the issue becomes the state government's matter. Rarely do you see the children of the middle-class attending public schools in the state when there are better alternatives, such as the private preprimary programs, she concluded.

Kemi, a parent and a preschool teacher shared similar view on the advantage of privately operated nursery school in the state.

> I will say most children in private nursery/primary schools are doing well. For instance, when they write the Common Entrance to the Federal Government Colleges, Unity Schools, etc., they admit them and they have good positions right from the beginning. I can remember as a parent and a teacher, my child in nursery one [age 3] could spell some words like three letter words, which I didn't expect. I was surprised to know all these things. I have a son in primary five [age 11] and before I withdrew him to a private school, he couldn't write anything; the writing was just horrible, and after spending some years in the private school he was able to write well. I think nursery school is good. (12.8.94)

The awareness and the need for preschool education in Ondo State is very obvious. The demand is so high and the awareness is also glaring, but most people cannot afford private schools because of the cost. Despite the problems confronting the public schools at present, both the poor and the average people have no other choices than to send their children to public schools no matter how deplorable the conditions. Kemi remarks that it is unfortunate that the government is not doing anything about this problem; instead the government officials prefer to transfer their children from public schools to the privately operated ones.

The administrators declined that the state government uses these private schools as another source of revenue, but some interviewees acknowledged that fact. Dare said,

> Government generates revenue through these established private nursery/primary schools. Whereas the government does not gain financially from the public schools. That is probably why the government cares less about the standard or what actually goes on in the public schools. (12. 8. 94)

This was the view shared by both Raphael and Dare. They see this as an advantage for the state government. The Deputy Director of Education and the Chief Education Officer mentioned similar things, but from a different perspective.

Some interviewees believe that the privately operated nursery school teachers are more dedicated, serious, and hardworking than the public school teachers. Pekun was comparing public school teachers with the private ones, and concluded that the private school teachers were more dedicated.

> I can't die because of any children, let me just do a few things and let them go and read themselves [public school teachers]. But the private ones, the proprietor [proprietress] would always ask their teachers what they are doing. And supervise their teachers to do this, do that, don't waste these children's time, you ought to go and teach them to recite their poem and so on. (26. 7. 94)

The above statement shows that the head teacher in the private school has more control of his or her school, and the teachers fear whoever is the leader because of what Komi called "the syndrome of hire and fire." Apparently, absolute power rests on the proprietor or proprietress of a privately owned nursery school; as a result, every member of staff tends to be up and doing and always alert. Komi says,

> Another advantage [of private schools] is that because of the high cost, high cost has been listed as a disadvantage, but it is an advantage in the sense that only those who are really willing, those who want to learn, those who believe their children should develop would send their children to private schools, and for that reason, they are always interested in the development of the school, they always attend the Parent/Teacher Association meetings. (4. 8. 94)

Komi sees the high cost of the private school as an advantage as opposed to a disadvantage. There is no doubt that some parents might see high cost as a factor to enhance their commitment and their active involvement in the school and their children's progress.

However, some participants believed that the same factor (the high cost) could lead to a care free attitude in parents. As Adun had mentioned earlier, most parents left the care and education of their children wholly in the hands of the teachers because they have paid them a huge amount of money. The belief is that their money will buy everything that needs to be done, hence most parents think their personal involvement is insignificant. But what is the fate of the majority of the poor parents who cannot afford the money?

Incorporating Preprimary Programs into the Public School System

The purpose of this section is to outline some of the advantages and disadvantages that the interviewees saw emanating from the incorporation of preschool programs into the educational system in the state. These advantages and disadvantages are discussed in the following order:

1. Benefits for children.
2. Benefits for parents.
3. Teacher benefits (i.e. salaries and benefits)
4. Facilities
5. Equity and access
6. Program needs, organization and administration

The underlying purpose of this research was to investigate and explore how preprimary programs could benefit every preschool age child in Ondo State. I will refer to the comments made from the administrative, parental, and preschool teachers' point of view. These are general comments about the incorporation of preprimary education programs into the public school system. An administrator says:

> As far as I am concerned, there will be no problem in incorporating the preschool program into the educational system in the state, since it is the local governments that now handle the primary education system. These local governments have been handling the Better Life Day Care centers for the past four years, now it will be easy for them to incorporate the preschool system into the primary system. The only problem they will face is the financial problem. (13. 7. 94)

A parent says:

> To incorporate preprimary education into our public schools, I think the advantages will actually outweigh the disadvantages. Now parents go to the courts to swear affidavit that their three and a half years old child is six, because they cannot pay for the [private] nursery school, but they want their child to attend, so they now swear [falsely]to an affidavit. They go to the primary school [public], give the false affidavit to the Headmaster and even when the Headmaster looks at the child and sees that the child doesn't look six, but since the birth certificate states that, the Headmaster has to take in such a child. So if we have preprimary education in the public school, then the parents may not have to tell lies any longer; they will know that whatever the age of their children, they will have a place in the government schools. (15. 7. 94)

This parent, (Yetty) explains further the effects of a child at age 3 being put into grade one:

> So, a child that is under five will now be forced to learn things that are meant for children above six. When you look at some of these children when they get to primary three, they become frustrated because they are being forced. (15 .7. 94)

One parent said:

> It is a matter of priority. If the state government decides to incorporate nursery school programs into the public school system, financially it should not be a problem, if priority is given to education at that level. Afterall, government spends huge amounts of money on things that are little or less important to the masses. I think preschool education is essential to all parents, children and the society as a whole. So, I believe it is a matter of priority. (14. 8. 94)

One of the preschool teachers I interviewed said that:

> So it is very good if the government can do that [incorporating nursery school into the public system]. There will be employment opportunities for the teachers. There are many Grade II teachers and NCE holders [Teacher Diploma Certificate] without a job. So if there is nursery school along with the existing public primary education then many people will be employed to teach and they will also employ helpers. I think the advantages are numerous. (18.7.94)

These were the general opinions and aspirations shared by the interviewees in this study. The concern expressed over the incorporation of preschool programs into the public school system encompassed such areas as the child, the family, the staff, and the community.

Benefits for children. All interviewees (14 plus a group of traditional leaders) felt that children would benefit from publicly operated preschool programs if they were well

organized and planned according to the goals and the objectives stated in the National Policy on Education. They felt that the programs could provide children with a wealth of new experiences, such as exposure to new materials, peer groups and adults, a smooth transition to primary school, and access, equity, and proximity in terms of the school's location to the child's home. However, some interviewees also felt that if preschool programs were incorporated into the public school system, children would suffer like their counterparts in the public schools because of incessant teachers' strike action in the state. Most of the findings serve to re-emphasize the purpose and objective set out in the National Policy on Education.

> The purpose of preprimary education should be: effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school; preparing the child for the primary level of education; providing adequate care and supervision for the children while their parents are at work (on the farms, in the markets, offices, etc.); inculcating social norms; inculcating in the child the spirit of enquiry and creativity through the exploration of nature, and the local environment, playing with toys, artistic and musical activities, etc.; teaching cooperation and team spirit; teaching the rudiments of numbers, letters, colors, shapes, terms, etc. through play; and teaching good habits, especially good health habits. (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1981, p. 7)

One interviewee expresses her view as to the advantages of preschool if incorporated into the public school system. She said,

> If preprimary education is incorporated into our public primary school in Ondo State, I don't think there is any disadvantage. Instead, we have a lot of advantages. For one thing, the children of poor people can now have preprimary education free of charge, then the children will be able to catch-up right from their tender age, and build upon these [skills] when they get to higher classes. If preprimary education is incorporated it will give room to a smooth educational system, because many children in the nursery schools still go to public primary schools. But if the preprimary schools are incorporated into our public schools, there will be a smooth transition from the preprimary to primary. This is a way of making education smoother and easier for children. (13.7.94)

Adun shared a similar opinion, but in the case of Adun, she goes further to mention the long-term effects of incorporating preschools into the public school system. She said,

> It means that every child in the state, whether in the local areas or in the urban centers or anywhere throughout the state will have the opportunity of receiving the preschool education program. And by the end of ten years you will see that the type of education received by our children will be great and challenging. The children would have been prepared for primary

> education with little or no problem. Apparently by the end of ten years the type of education offered in Ondo State would have changed positively. Unlike these days when you go into secondary schools, you will see that some students in JSS (Junior Secondary School) cannot write correctly because they did not have the preschool education. These are basic things they should have learnt before going to primary school. Unfortunately, when these basic things are not learnt at an early stage, they may not be provided again. So, if preschool is made part of public education, there is no doubt, it will be a great idea. (14. 8. 94)

Adun emphasizes the preparatory and smooth transition effects of the publicly operated nursery school on the preschoolers. The fact that children in both the rural and urban areas will benefit was highlighted as an advantage of publicly operated preschools in the state. Another interviewee said that children who passed through the publicly operated nursery school would be prepared for the external examinations in the future because they would have enjoyed quality education from an early age.

Komi identifies location or what he calls proximity of the schools to where children live as an advantage of the incorporation.

> The walking distance from the school to individual homes will be reduced, and that has a lot of influence on the learning of the pupils. A child who has trekked before getting to school might be tired, a child whose parent must get somewhere before taking him [her] to the school might be late to the school and therefore might miss some part of the lesson. So all these obstacles will be removed because there would be a nursery school in the neighborhood of every child, it is an advantage. (4. 8. 94)

Presently in Ondo State, there is not a village without a primary school, no matter how small the population. Some villages have two to three primary schools, not to mention the cities where primary schools are located on almost every street. The implication of this is that, if preschool education is incorporated into the public school system, every town and village will have a nursery section. This is what another interviewee calls "access of every child, both in the village and town, to preschool education program." Pekun expresses her views about the incorporation thus:

> It depends. If the government takes absolute control of the preprimary schools and gives what is needed there, and they are able to finance it, such as not to neglect the teachers as they do the public school teachers right now, I think, it will be a great success. The teachers need to be paid promptly and with their benefits as well. Obviously, the children will also

> benefit a lot because the teachers will do their work wholeheartedly. (26. 7. 94)

Pekun says that the success of the publicly operated nursery schools depends on how the government treats the teachers. In other words better treatment leads to good services. Pekun had in mind the deteriorating condition of both the public schools and their teachers. Unfortunately, the same problem could be transferred to the preprimary section if incorporated. This I will discuss in the later part of this chapter.

A parent in this study opines that publicly operated nursery schools will enhance the communicative ability of the preschoolers.

> Judging from my personal research I discover that communication is the bane of learning and teaching, if you solve the problem of communication, the child you think is dull will perform brilliantly. You can reach him [or her]. So the gap between the channel of communication is the one causing problems. The child that goes through the nursery system has a high communicative ability, that is one major thing they develop. The child will be able to speak English, will be able to talk it, his [her] reasoning faculty would be different from the reasoning faculty of a child who has not been exposed to that type of thing, so it is a big advantage. And that single one seems to bring along a lot of other advantages along the line. (4. 8. 94)

I mentioned earlier in this study that most parents send their children to the privately operated nursery schools so that the children can learn how to speak English, even though the National Policy on Education says the medium of communication at that level should be the language of the local environment or the mother tongue of the child. It is a sense of pride in Nigerian society for a parent whose preschool age child knows how to speak English.

However, some interviewees identified some factors that could negatively affect the child if preschool programs are publicly operated. For instance, Adun said,

> What happens to the public primary schools will happen to the preprimary schools. For instance, teachers go on strike anytime they like, because they depend on the government, you know "when two elephants fight the grass will always suffer." (20. 7. 94)

Right now, the public school has a problem because of the incessant strike actions of the teachers. To make the situation worse, the state government seems unconcerned about the teachers' requests and problems. The longer the closure of schools, the more children will

suffer. That is the implication of the above mentioned proverb that "when two elephants fight the grass will always suffer." Children will always be at a disadvantage as long as teachers are on strike.

Sarah, the Chief Education Officer, shared the same view about the problem. She said,

> I think it will be good if there could be public nursery and primary schools. But my fear is that whenever there is a political or industrial demand by the teachers they will go on strike and this will affect the children. That is the reason why I may not encourage the public to operate nursery and primary schools. But the private people could be encouraged. And we really encourage them in Ondo State, because there is rarely any month that two or three schools are not approved. (18. 7. 94)

Some participants wonder how the state government encourages the private operators of nursery schools in the state. I asked the Chief Education Officer whether the approval of two or more private nursery schools is an indication of encouragement given to these operators by the government or what does it exactly mean? She responded by defending the government's so-called "encouragement role". The reason for the encouragement of private operators of preschool is obvious. According to Yetty, it means there is more money for renewal and registration for the state government. Apart from that, the needs of the masses, especially the poor children, is not taken into consideration. Anyone would agree that the incessant strike actions by the public school teachers could adversely affect the education of children, but could there be something we could do to avert this problem?

Another interviewee, Raphael, shared a similar problem concerning the teachers' strike.

> For example, these primary school teachers have been on strike maybe three weeks, and these children are playing at home, many of them have been taken to the farm. By the time they are back in school, their brain would have been dormant, so if the state government should take over these nursery schools, I think the delay in the payment of salary [teachers'] is going to continue and this will invariably affect the pupils. (8. 8. 94)

The interviewees feel that the major disadvantage of children attending a publicly operated preschool program could be the strike actions by the teachers.

Benefits for parents. Most of the interviewees agreed that publicly operated preprimary programs would be beneficial to the parents in some ways. Dare said,

> At least it will give every parent the opportunity of sending their children to these public nursery schools, unlike when they are just left alone in the hands of the private owners whereby the parents cannot afford the school fees. (16. 7. 94)

Apparently only a few parents could send their children to the private nursery schools in the state because of the unavoidable fees. However, with the incorporation of preschool education into the public school system, every parent will have the opportunity of sending their children there. This opinion is shared by most interviewees. For instance, Komi opines that,

> There are lots of privileges, if there is no publicly operated preschool what will become of the child of a working mother like me with a poor salary just to keep the soul and the body together? So, the advantages are many, apart from keeping the children busy at school, instead of roaming about in the street while their parents are at work. It will definitely prepare them for primary education and relieve parents of the embarrassment of transition from home to the school. Sometimes the transition could be traumatic for both the child and the parent, without previous preparatory programs. (18. 7. 94)

This view is similar to the objectives of preprimary education in the National Policy on Education. Komi also believes that the incorporation of preprimary education into the public school system will help parents develop a closer link with the schools.

> I think it is an advantage to have publicly operated preschool because parents will have a closer link with such schools. Years ago, you didn't even know where your teacher was born. Even at the secondary school you looked at your teacher as an angel who will never had time to urinate or to eat. But as we have more public schools, we discovered that these teachers are part and parcel of us and there is a big advantage there. If my father knows you are my teacher, you will be careful before you are wicked to me and everybody will become his brothers' keeper. Therefore, the system from that angle runs smoothly. Apart from that, I want to say that the government who will be operating these schools will be relieved in a way. For instance, if we transfer the idea of sincerity and dedication of the parents to the progress of the school, I mean public nursery schools, the result will be a huge success. (4. 8. 94)

As opined by Komi, if preprimary education is publicly operated, the public schools might develop a different outlook. Parents and communities may be more committed to the

progress of public schools. Pekun and Dele have similar opinions as to the parents' benefits if preschools are incorporated into the public school system. Pekun says,

> If the preschool program is incorporated into the public school system, the parents will benefit a lot, in that they will pay less money than they are paying now. (26. 7. 94)

Dele's view is more global. He believes that:

> As a parent who has put his or her child in a very standard nursery and primary school, such a parent has a very good future because as we know presently in the country, education is the order of the day. If you are able to acquire just a little education, I believe you are part of the system, nobody will be able to cheat you just like that. So, by putting our children in the public nursery school, it gives us a very great advantage in terms of social, moral, and economic aspects of life. (8. 8. 94)

Apparently there is no way for every parent to send their children to preschool without making it less expensive, especially in a country where over 80% of the population live in abject poverty. Dele's aspiration is very promising, but it has to depend on what Pekun said earlier which is to make preschool education free or to become publicly operated.

Nevertheless, some interviewees are more pessimistic. They say that if preschool is made public, some parents may not benefit. Soyinu explains why.

> The reason is that, even when you make everything free, if you ask people to eat, they may be hungry but have reason not to eat. Do you understand what I am trying to say? When you are trying to give all what you have to make people to have an equal right to education, there will still be some parents that will have reasons not to send their children. "You can only force a horse to the river but you cannot force a horse to drink water" says a Yoruba adage. What I think is that government should do its own part as well as the private, so that all children can have a good education. (20. 7. 94)

Soyinu is a teacher and an administrator as well as a proprietor of a private nursery and primary school in Ondo city. The reality of the view expressed above cannot be denied in Ondo State where over 60% of the population is illiterate. There are peasant farmers who live in the rural areas and some parents prefer to take their children to the farm rather than sending them to school. Therefore, if preschool is made public, perhaps some parents will not see the need to send their children. In this respect, the purpose may be defeated. Public

awareness and parent education should precede the institutionalization of the programs and should remain part of the programs as well.

Teacher benefits. At the present time in Ondo State public school teachers are hired on a permanent basis by the Teaching Service Board. Their salaries, allowances, promotions, and other emoluments are paid by the Board through public taxes. Apparently all teachers in the public schools in Ondo State are trained and well qualified. However, in the private schools payment of the teachers' salaries, and other allowances where applicable, are the sole responsibility of each private school. Hence, most teachers operating in the private schools are either untrained or trained but not qualified.

In relation to the preschool programs and who can teach in them, the National Policy on Education and Ondo State Guidelines on the operation of private nursery and primary schools have set forth the following regulations:

> Government will make provision in Teacher Training Institutions for student teachers who want to specialize in preprimary education; ... regulate and control the operation of preprimary education as well as ensure that the staff of preprimary institutions are adequately trained and that essential equipment is provided. (Fed. Rep. of Nig., 1981, p. 7)

The policy statement seems very vague because it does not specify the actual qualifications of teachers who teach at the preprimary level. However, the Ondo State guidelines on the operation of private nursery/primary schools are more specific about the qualification of teachers who are in the nursery schools:

> The head teacher/class teacher shall be a kindergarten teacher holding a minimum qualification of grade II Teachers' Certificate. However, the possession of any of the following qualifications would be an advantage:
>
> a) Grade I Teachers' Certificate
>
> b) An Associateship Diploma in Education Certificate of a recognized university with specialization on preprimary education
>
> c) National Froebel Diploma
>
> d) Montessori Diploma
>
> e) U.K. Ministry of Education Certificate

f) N.C.E. preprimary/primary of any recognized university

g) B.Ed., B.A.(Educ.) with specialization in preprimary education

h) Any other qualifications in Early Childhood Education approved by the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 1989, pp. 6-7).

All interviewees felt it was vital that preschool teachers have training in early childhood education, a desire to work with young children, and the ability to work with parents. Teachers' education was seen as essential to provide the necessary background knowledge in child development, the play approach, and the "whole" child concept of teaching.

I asked the participants about the benefits and problems for teachers if preschool education is incorporated into the public school system. They felt the benefits included:

i Good salary structure

ii Allowances such as vehicle loans, rent subsidy, leave bonus, transport allowance, and retirement benefit.

iii Security of job

iv The resources within the public school and system available to the teacher.

v Access to facilities and resource personnel.

vi The contact or interaction with other teachers in the public school system.

vii The inservice training.

viii Preschool teachers will be viewed as an integral part of the school system.

Fasa, a parent and one of the participants in this study stated:

> If preschool is operated by the government, they can employ well-qualified staff who are committed and dedicated to the education of young children. Obviously, the government will pay the teachers regularly and have enough instructional materials for them to work with. I could remember when I was in primary school, we had a sand tray where we could train our hands on how to write. It is going to be a better idea than when an individual is operating preschool program. (11.7.94)

Fasa goes further to ask herself that if the salary of the government is regular and higher, "why do I need to go to private institutions and teach where they do not pay their teachers regularly? It is cheating", she concluded. Adun believes that:

> If eventually the preschool program is incorporated into our educational system, apparently teachers' benefits will be numerous. If assistant teachers or teachers are employed by the government to teach in the preprimary section of the primary school, just like teachers employed to teach in the primary school, they will be paid on the same salary scale as specified by the state government regulations. Definitely teachers will like to go there and there will be no more shortage of qualified teachers. (13. 7. 94)

One essential aspect of a teacher's job satisfaction is the quality of their work environment. Also to feel personally fulfilled there are personal rewards or types of remuneration that one hopes to gain from their occupation. In regard to the preschool education programs, this job satisfaction may vary depending on whether a teacher is employed by a privately operated school or publicly operated school. I felt it was imperative that this area be researched and that various points of view be examined.

As mentioned earlier, one important point emphasized by all the interviewees was the fact that publicly operated nursery schools under the management of the Primary School Teaching Management Board have the capacity to absorb a lot of the operational costs of preschool education programs (facilities, equipment, transportation, infrastructure, furniture, etc.) which a privately operated preschool cannot afford. Therefore, because of the payment of annual renewal of license, approval fees, inspection, and other financial obligations of private operators, there may be less money for teachers' salaries, school development, and teachers' allowances. Dele opines that:

> Why I prefer public nursery schools is that like all other public schools controlled by the government, you see that the condition of service will be better than that of the private schools. (16. 7. 94)

Another interviewee expresses her view this way:

> Teachers in the publicly operated nursery schools will receive the same salary scale like their counterparts in the primary section. We know that the private schools cannot meet teachers' demands, but if it is incorporated the government will pay their full salaries, leave bonus, other allowances, so the teachers will benefit greatly. (26. 7. 94)

Pekun goes further to buttress her view why she thinks that teachers who teach in the publicly operated nursery school benefit more than those who teach in the private ones.

> The government will pay the salary of their teachers according to the salary scale of the public school teachers. How can you finish your education and be working in the private school where they cannot meet your demands? (26. 7. 94)

Dele also believes that publicly operated nursery schools will be more beneficial to the teachers than the private ones.

> The essence of working is money. As we all know, if somebody is working with the state government you have to be paid on a grade level basis. As an N.C.E. holder you will be paid on grade level 7, and if the same N.C.E. is working under a private school the salary will not be equal with those teaching in the government schools. Afterall, you have gone for the same course, you suffered the same way at school, and you have both undergone the same process of education. (8. 8. 94)

As an employee of a publicly operated nursery school, a teacher belongs to a collective bargaining unit, and can be a full member of the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT). In this respect, teachers' qualifications (training and experience) are assessed and there is an assurance of receiving the wage agreed upon by the Primary School Management Board and the Local Service Board. The teacher has the security of permanency of position. As a result of these previously mentioned benefits, the publicly operated nursery schools will be able to attract certified, well-qualified teachers for their positions. The security that a publicly operated preschool can offer a successful teacher can, in turn, benefit the preprimary school programs. The cost of retaining the services of professionals in preschools is borne by the total operational budget of the system. A privately operated preschool cannot afford to do this.

There are, however, a number of disadvantages the interviewees cited for a teacher who is involved in a publicly operated nursery school. They are:

1. Teachers will now depend solely on the government for everything thus reducing their creativity and working powers.
2. It might lead to a lack of commitment on the part of the teachers.
3. The constraining forces on the teacher's planning of a program as a result of being part of a large public school system such as timetabling, assemblies, obeying petty rules and regulations, etc.

According to Soyinu,

> If the preschool program is publicly operated the teachers and staff there will not work conscientiously, because their salary will not be enough to feed their families. They might go to another business, and that will jeopardize the academic standard of these schools. (20. 7. 94)

Soyinu cited some examples from the Better Life Day Care centers being operated by the local governments in Ondo State. He explains their possible shortcomings.

> We have the preschool [Day Care Centers] for the Better Life, and this is controlled by the government, though they put it under the adult education program. But what we found out was that the workers are not up and doing [not hardworking], because they depend on what the government will give to them. But you know for the private, the private will look into the ability of the teachers, because they know that if the teachers are slack, the children will lose, and that will spoil the image of their schools. (20. 7. 94)

Raphael expresses a different view.

> I will prefer to teach in the private school in the sense that I don't want my salary to be delayed because of the situation in the country, but under normal circumstance I will like to work in the public nursery schools, because they pay more salary, allowances, the leave bonus and others and you work less. (22. 7. 94)

The opinion expressed above was the "true" picture of the public school teachers when I was conducting this research. I mentioned earlier in this study that Ondo State teachers were on strike when this study was being conducted and the main reason for this industrial action was the delay in the payment of their salaries and other benefits. Sometimes their salaries were accumulated for three months before any payments were made by the government. So, public school teachers were in a hectic and unpleasant situation.

Another crucial point raised by Raphael has to do with teachers avoiding work, especially in the public schools. He said, "Ogo ta ogo O ta, owo alaru aape." That is, as a government employee whether you work hard or not, your salary will be paid at the end of the month. I would like to reserve my comment here to the last section of this chapter where I will discuss various suggestions made by interviewees as to the alternative ways of operating preschool programs in the state. The point raised above will be comprehensively discussed.

Facilities. From the data collected the unanimous opinion was that facilities were very important. Most of the interviewees believed that publicly operated nursery schools will definitely have more access to facilities than the private ones. Suyi compares the publicly operated Better Life Day Care centers with the private ones.

> I can rightly confirm that the Better Life Day Care centers have more amenities than the privately owned day care centers right now in Ondo State, because most of the facilities that we recommended for the Better Life Day Care centers are not existing in the privately owned day care centers. (13. 7. 94)

Apparently there is a need to furnish a facility appropriately to meet the needs of the program and children. Also there could be an important boost to children's and teachers' morale in attractive and comfortable surroundings. All interviewees viewed it as advantageous to have preschool programs operating within public school facilities. Some of the more prevailing advantages cited were the accessibility to areas such as the library, art room, music and science rooms, language laboratory, gymnasium, and playground. There is also the feeling of "community" when preschoolers are considered a part of the school. In the same vein, Mitchell (1988) stresses that it is beneficial if preschool programs and primary school programs are housed in the same building. She suggests this may be difficult especially in rural areas, but administrators and teachers should work towards this goal. She also mentions other ways in which programs can be physically brought together. For example, there can be interclass visits, special events and festivals, combined field trips, and so forth.

In relation to the disadvantages of preprimary programs operating within the public school system, the following points were raised: facility and mismanagement, redundancy of facilities, and the problem of flexibility for the preschool program. As a part of the school system, a preprimary program may soon become governed by school timetabling, schedules, rules, and regulations, bells, assigned recess, programmed play, breaks, and so on. This can put constraints on the program and on the teacher plans. Soyinu says:

> Take for instance in a public school where the headmaster is not paid for three months, and now is given money to buy teaching aids. Such a headmaster will divert the money to his [her] own family to take care of them. Then he [she] will be complaining in the school that there are no

> teaching aids, the government is not supplying this or supplying that, afterall, the government could have supplied everything. But because there is not financial support on the part of the headmaster, then he [she] will have to utilize the school money, and therefore leave the whole class or school empty. That is what we are seeing in our schools today. There is no adequate care for the schools, not that the government is not trying its best but the "best" goes to the purse of the headmasters or the teachers in the school. (20. 7. 94)

Soyinu explains that even where all the facilities are available in the school, most of the public school teachers would rather abandon them than use them in their classes. Komi believes that:

> If preschool becomes a public thing, unless the government is serious the monitoring becomes relaxed, all the bit of carefree attitude on the part of teachers may now come to show itself and therefore the system will become wishy-washy. The facilities that make nursery school a conducive and stimulating learning environment may not be there. There are two parts to that, some headmasters will take the money and spend it instead of using it for the school purpose. Some headmasters are not bold enough to request for what their schools are lacking. Up till now the public schools are lacking chalks, no sufficient apparatus, in fact there are a lot of things they lack. (12. 8. 94)

No matter the effort being made by the government as to the delivery of preschool programs and provision of facilities, the success of the program is contingent on the sincerity and dedication of teachers. Some interviewees felt that if preschool programs were incorporated into the public system, consideration must be given to class size. Some interviewees were concerned that the schools might be over populated, thus affecting the quality of the programs.

Equity and access. As mentioned earlier in this study, the Nigerian philosophy of education is built on 'equal educational opportunities' for all citizens. The Nigerian constitution also states that "Government shall direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979, Sec. 18.1). For the purpose of this study, I felt it was appropriate to include the interviewees views and beliefs on the issues of equity and access of all children to preschool programs if incorporated into the public school system. The people interviewed

unanimously believed that the incorporation of preschool programs into the public school system would enhance equity and access of every preschool age child rich or poor, in both rural and urban centers. Dare said:

> The only advantage I can see if the preschool program becomes public is that it is for all sorts of people; the poor, the rich, and others will have access to education there. (11. 7. 94)

Another interviewee expresses a similar view.

> It is good for public primary schools to have nursery sections or preschool sections because children between age three and five years can attend. What do we expect them to be doing before age six? And people cannot afford these private nursery schools and you see these children roaming about when they should be learning useful things in the schools but because of lack of funds these children will be compelled to stay at home wasting the precious years and these are formative years, things learnt at this period are very crucial. So with public nursery schools all children will have the opportunity of attending. (14. 8. 94)

Adun explains that "not only the children of the rich people will be going to preschool institutions, if the government makes it its priority, I think all people of the state will benefit from such programs."

Betty withdrew her child from the private preschool because of the financial responsibility was too much for her. When we started our discussion on the issues of equity and access of all children to preschool programs, she seems to be very emotional and critical of promoting elitism in our society via education. She states that:

> So everything will be free, if you are rich, your child will be there, we don't want to know about your richness and if you are poor your child will also be there. This is real equal educational opportunity. (2. 8. 94)

Raphael believes that the incorporation of preschool programs will give every child the opportunity of "drinking from the water of knowledge" whether poor or rich.

> Well, we have already mentioned a lot of the advantages, but most importantly is that there will be equity, that is the opportunity so that everybody could drink from the water of knowledge. (4. 8. 94)

Most of the interviewees considered the issues of equity and access of every child into the preschool program as the most essential benefit. Komi said, "other things can be

compromised but not the issues of equal opportunity and accessibility of our children to early childhood education programs in this state." Dele opines that:

> But the merit at the same time is that if government establish their own nursery schools, there will not be competition since that of the government will be free or cheaper, then people will like to send their children to the government schools. The majority of children will like to go to school. And more, there will be more enrollment. (20.7.94)

Komi expresses his support for equal opportunity for all children to attend preschool programs.

> Equal opportunity for all children at preschool is what I strongly support. But how to come about it is the problem. And we can only come about it if government can establish their own preschool institutions, and make it free for all and sundry. (20. 7. 94)

In the same vein, Pekun opines that:

> For the children, they will also have an advantage, in that everyone will now have access to enjoy preschool programs if government decides to incorporate it into our educational system. It is the only way to bridge the so-wide gap between the poor masses and the few rich as far as preschool education is concerned. (26. 7. 94)

The people interviewed for this study unanimously agree and believe that the only way to promote equal educational opportunities is for the government to incorporate preschool programs into the educational system. Otherwise the so-called Nigerian philosophy of education that is supposed to be based on the equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation will never be realized.

However, three interviewees expressed their views about the problems that might affect the issues of equity and access if preschool programs are eventually incorporated into the public school system in Ondo State. Raphael says,

> If government organizes any school today, it is going to be to the advantage of the 'high-ups' from my own point of view. For instance, the government unity schools, the federal colleges, and many good institutions only admit the sons and daughters of the "UPS" [upper class]. Even though these public preschool programs have to be introduced, some people, like myself, may not be allowed to send their children there unless there are clear cut guidelines from the government. (22. 7. 94)

Some participants remarked that every Nigerian knows that the State Government Unity Colleges, the Federal Colleges, and other secondary schools of such high quality are

established to promote elitism and inequality in the country. Yetty maintains, "However, my vision of public preschool programs is quite different from that." She states that in terms of the organization and administration it is hoped that public preschool programs will be run by the Primary School Management Board and a preschool section will be created in each public primary school. Therefore, as long as public primary schools are free for all children, and the admissions are based on the attainment of the statutory age, then preschool provisions should not be manipulated by a few "high-ups" in our society.

Another interviewee, Raphael, was very pessimistic about the attainment of equal educational opportunities at preschool level.

> If the government should establish its own nursery school now, I think it will be to the benefit of the fortunate few, the lower ones in the society will still be suffering. They will tighten the admission there. (12. 8. 94)

He goes further to explain that the fortunate few he was referring to are not necessarily the rich people but the influential and perhaps the government officials in our society who can use their positions to get whatever they want. Then I suggested public preschool programs might operate the same way the public primary schools do. Maybe the admission of children to preschool programs will have nothing to do with the parents' backgrounds; rich, poor, influential, or social status. He concluded: "Okay, if that is the case, I think there will be some sort of equity in the system."

Nevertheless, the points raised are very crucial to the effective delivery of the preschool program if eventually it is incorporated into the public school system. I think these points should not be discarded as irrelevant, but all necessary cautions should be taken to enhance equal educational opportunities if the preschool program is incorporated into the public school system.

Program needs, organization and administration. Unlike primary or secondary teachers, preschool teachers have not been bound to follow a set program. The reasons are first, the lack of centralized government control over this form of education and second, a

belief that a heavily structured or formal curriculum is unsuitable at this level. In general the approach of preschool teachers in some private schools has favored the 'traditional' free play program with more emphasis on providing for children's social and emotional development. According to the data collected for this study, I discovered that the undiluted Montessori method featuring a prepared environment and very specific items of equipment never really gained a firm hold. As earlier mentioned in this study, the National Policy on Education specifically recommends that teaching and learning of young children should be done through play methods. However, only a few private preschool institutions abide by this rule. According to an interviewee, the "child is made to sit down and listen to dogmatic pedagogy of the coercive teacher." Betty says:

> Some pupils in my school attended private preprimary and primary schools, but now they are in secondary. They are so messed up because the rote learning system of education they went through. They crammed [memorized] a lot but to write it down is a problem. But if they had attended a public preschool with qualified teachers, perhaps appropriate methods would have been used. (11.7.94)

Another interviewee, Kemi, believes that if the preschool program is incorporated into the public school system "then a child that is under five will not be forced to learn things that are meant for children above six." Most of the participants in this study shared the view that if the preschool program is publicly operated, with a central body and a uniform program, then learning activities will be undertaken by children in accordance with their individual needs and these will be experienced within structured and child initiated play. Based on the objectives of preschool programs as stated in the National Policy on Education, emphasis will be placed on the development of a positive self-concept and the assurance of self-satisfaction in each child. Opportunities will also be provided for learning within an environment designed to meet the physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and creative needs of each child.

Some interviewees expressed their feelings and fears as to the standard of preschool programs if incorporated into the public system. Joseph believes that:

> The rate at which the education standard is falling in Ondo State, especially the way the public schools are being managed now, I am afraid that in the same way the preschool programs might be affected if incorporated into public school system. So, the standard might be sacrificed and all the problems that we are encountering in the public schools now will befall preschool sections. (26. 7. 94)

The interviewees considered it unfortunate that the strike actions of the teachers in Ondo State have affected or crippled the school system throughout the state. The fear is that if the preschool program becomes a part of the school system the same problem might face the program.

One of the differences one could envisage between the publicly operated preschool programs and the privately operated ones is in the organization and administration of the two programs. Apparently if preschool programs are publicly operated the programs will be able to make use of a relatively complex administrative superstructure to manage the affairs of the various programs. This means things like salaries, benefits, and maintenance will be centralized and highly standardized. As one interviewee puts it, the administration will be stable in terms of personnel, location, and even such intangibles as philosophy. In contrast, privately operated preschool programs are not able to call on the same type of administrative superstructure, they are essentially operated like many of the other voluntary type agencies or "business ventures" that exist in our society. Consequently the administration is often of an unstable, transient nature and the administrative staff may vary from year to year. These people bring different philosophies to the organization and this may prove problematic in terms of program continuity.

A majority of the interviewees did express concern that within the system of private operators there are many discrepancies. They feel that if preschool programs become a part of the public system the type of administrative support that will be given by both the local school board and the Primary School Management Board will be advantageous.

However, there were concerns about the execution and organization of the program if it became a part of the public educational system. As Komi pointed out:

> One is afraid whether a public nursery school will maintain its standard and be well organized. But I believe that if there is a competition, for instance, if we have private ones and we also have public ones, that competition may ginger the government to do exactly what they are supposed to do. That is a theoretical statement, because there are privately owned schools now in the country and in this state, the government sees how they are performing, in fact many of these government officials withdrew their children from the public schools and put them into these privately operated schools and they don't see the need to improve the lot of the public schools. So that is why I say the statement is theoretical; competition is supposed to bring healthy rivalry and improvement, but in a country where people are selfish, you hardly get the best. (12. 8. 94)

Komi goes further to express his feelings and beliefs about the administrative problems this program might encounter. He says that:

> You see Nigerians are good planners in a way, there are good ones who can plan but when it comes to an execution, that is where the disadvantage comes in. I don't know why it is so. And honestly, as an educator I have found it very difficult to answer, so don't even ask me. (12. 8. 94)

The point raised above by Komi was also shared by two other interviewees in what they called "poor management" that could result if preschool programs became a part of the school system. They also feel that privately operated preschool programs have a more informal administration that can easily make decisions. If it becomes publicly operated, it will have to go through the same formal bureaucratic channel as the public school system.

Despite the discrepancies envisaged if preschool programs became publicly operated, the majority of interviewees supported the incorporation and the centralized preschool administration. The centralization was seen as making the provision of preschool programs more consistent, more egalitarian, and often more efficient.

Operating Preprimary Programs in the Public Schools

The basis of this research was to explore who should be operating preschool programs in Ondo State. Even though there was no particular question that addressed the issue of public schools in the Ondo State, most of the interviewees freely mentioned the dilemma of public schools. They also asked what would become of preschools if incorporated, considering the many woes that are befalling our public schools today. The

participants in this study talked freely about their feelings and beliefs on the present situation of public schools. The discussion on who should operate preschool programs would not be complete without considering the views expressed by interviewees on the predicaments of public schools in the state. Therefore, I will refer to the different comments, views, and beliefs expressed by the interviewees. Betty states that:

> The way the government is handling the teachers in the public schools is very unprofessional. They will not pay their salaries for about six months, consequently the children will stay at home. Can you imagine a child staying at home for six months without going to school? Obviously the child will be dull, and backward in his or her study. That is why I withdrew my child from public school to the private one, so that he can have the same opportunity with other children. (2. 8. 94)

Public schools in Ondo State are faced with numerous problems, and these problems are very much connected with one another. Some interviewees believe that the unstable political and economic condition in the country is the basis of all these problems. Others believe it is the carefree attitude of the government, especially to education (e.g. failure to pay teachers' salaries for months, lack of infrastructural facilities, poor supervision, school dropouts, deterioration of education). Yetty says:

> It is rather unfortunate that there is no thorough commitment on the part of the teachers in our public schools today. And the disciplinary aspect is very slack in our public schools. Things are falling apart and the center cannot hold. (11. 7. 94)

Another interviewee, Soyinu, expresses his views on why teachers are no longer committed and dedicated to their work in the public schools. He maintains that:

> As a headmaster in the public school for so many years, and I don't have anything to show for it in term of material wealth, the implication is that I will be looking elsewhere to take care of myself and my family. And a teacher who has not received two months salary, apparently such an individual will eat, have a family to look after, thus, such a teacher will not be blamed for going to "Jan Kara" [big market] to buy some "Tokunbo" shirts [imported secondhand shirts] and to peddle about. So, if the government changes its profile and it realizes that there are basic things that a person needs and those things are provided for the teachers or the citizens as a whole, then people's attitudes to work might change considerably. (4. 8. 94)

In my conversations with Yetty, she points out that the major problem of this country, in which education is a part, is the government imposed military dictatorship.

> When you vote for a government you have a say in that government and if it refuses to listen, you can always hold on to your voice until you are heard, but as long as the government is imposed, there cannot be solutions. In the sense that an imposed government is not forced to tell you its programs, but an elected government may entertain dialogue, and suggestions, so it seems as if the government of this country does not have much to offer on quality education. In fact as much as we are trying, any suggestion that will make the government to dip its hands into its purse is not tolerated. But when there is an elected government voted in by the people of Ondo State, because Ondo State used to have education as the most important thing in their agenda, we can expect that our voice will be heard and honored. Until then, perhaps there is no concrete solution to our educational system. Whatever is said now will be trashed aside, but if 'politically we are healthy then educationally we will also be healthy'. (15. 7. 94)

Constitutionally both secondary and primary education are decentralized, and therefore it is the responsibility of each state to operate its system of education in the way it seems fit. However, the role of the federal government in the provisions of funds to education in each state is quite relevant and important.

Yetty says the general situation in the country is a major cause of the deterioration in the standard of public education in Ondo State.

> An educational system that produces a graduate that cannot speak English, also an educational system that forces a graduate to become a taxi driver is a sign that the system is almost destroyed. Perhaps, if I have the opportunity I will not pay any taxes, because I cannot see what exactly I am enjoying, for instance, there is no pipe-borne water, we have to depend on well water, there is no light [electricity]. The roads are very deplorable, things are so expensive, and the kind of education your child receives is a watchout [substandard]. So, you ask yourself why am I paying all these taxes? (15. 7. 94)

Adun says,

> I will just have to say that with the present situation of things in the country, I don't think that the charges to parents by these private schools are too much. I think these schools also consider the present situation of things in the country because things are extremely expensive. What I am saying is that, if every parent is given the opportunity of sending their children to preschool education, obviously, we still need to do something about the economy of the country, I think that is what is affecting everybody. (16.7.94)

Adun identified the root cause of the public school's dilemma as the economic recession and the unprecedented high cost of the essential commodities in the country. Dele said:

> The way government is handling the teachers in Nigeria does not augur well at all. At times the School Board will transfer you to the rural area, they

> leave you there for three months without being paid. I remember some teachers were fed up with the situation and resigned. They finally established private nursery schools. (20. 7. 94)

Some interviewees said that most private nursery schools in the rural areas sprang up because some public school teachers were fed up with the deplorable way they were being treated by the government and decided to start their own schools. All the people interviewed expressed their dissatisfaction with the way public schools are deteriorating and called for immediate intervention to alleviate the total collapse of the system.

Sarah, responding to the question of who should operate preschool programs, said:

> If it is possible for government to operate preschool programs and make it viable, well it is good. Even the present public primary education, the government is finding it difficult to maintain its standard. The teachers are on strike all the time, so it will not be reasonable to advise the government to embark all alone on nursery/primary education because of the funding. But if the condition improves, I think it is better to have public nursery education as well as private nursery education. It will now be the decision of the parents to take their children to either the privately owned or the publicly owned schools. (18. 7. 94)

The Chief Education Officer suggested that both the private and government sectors should operate nursery schools and that parents should decide where to send their children. According to her, the incorporation of preschool education is contingent on the improvement of the economic situation of the state. The question is how long before that materializes and what would happen to the educational system that is on the verge of collapse in the state? Even though right now "things have fallen apart and the center can no longer hold", as one interviewee puts it, do we fold our arms and allow things to completely collapse? Adun says, "I don't think the young and the coming generations will ever forgive us if nothing is done now."

Another interviewee raised the doubt that education is really free in the public primary schools. Fasa said the idea of free education is a relative term.

> The government primary school is not absolutely free. For instance, my children attend Adeyemi Primary School, it is supposed to be a government owned primary school and my children still pay fees. Parents pay in cash and in kind so it is not free in the real sense of the word, I think they pay thirty naira per term, plus the examination fee, table fee, development fee

> and different types of fees. You ask yourself whether it is actually free? (15. 7. 94)

Fasa also commented on the deplorable supervisory role of the Ministry of Education.

> The functionaries in the Ministry of Education do not actually come out to supervise these schools. They don't even supervise government primary schools, not to mention the supervision of privately owned schools. (15. 7. 94)

There were mixed feelings expressed by the people interviewed as to who should operate preprimary education programs in Ondo State. However, the majority of the interviewees believed that government sectors should be actively involved in the provisions of the programs. Some interviewees suggested that both private and government sectors should be allowed to operate preschool programs and two participants suggested a co-founders approach. That is, preschool provision should be a joint venture among the government, voluntary organizations, and the community. The need for both privately and publicly operated preschool will be discussed later in this chapter under a different theme. Most of the interviewees believed that government should operate preschool programs. Betty said,

> I think if the government can operate preschool programs, perhaps, it will be better. Except that the government is making a mess of the system of education, that is, there is no clear cut system of education in Nigeria. Today, it is strike, tomorrow it is N.A.S.U. [National Academic Staff Union] or teachers' problems, and a day after it will be students' riot. In such situation what can we do as parents? We don't have a choice other than to send our children to these private schools but if the government can operate public schools effectively, there will be no need to patronize private schools. If otherwise, it would be a thing of joy to have our children in private schools where there will be no teachers' strike interruption. (11. 7. 94)

Betty expresses her views on why she thinks government should be actively involved in the provisions of preschool programs in the state.

> I think the government should actually be involved in the preschool education since these children first and foremost are Nigerian citizens and their parents pay taxes. I believe that the government should actually be concerned especially when you now talk of an average Nigerian being a government employee, the government that we serve with our strength should actually be concerned and be very involved with the education of our young children. (15. 7. 94)

She therefore suggests that:

> Government should operate preschool education centers or they could encourage the missionaries, as well as non-profit organizations to jointly establish preschool programs. Again, preschool education could be subsidized by the government: if the parents have to pay at all, it will be very minimal. (15. 7. 94)

Another interviewee expresses an opinion different from what I have been discussing above. According to Dele, preschool programs should be privately operated. This is the opinion he held at the beginning of our conversation, but during later conversations I had with him, he expressed a different opinion. He eventually concluded that both operators, that is, private and public, should exist. At first he said:

> In my own view, preschool should be privately operated. If it is privately operated, there will be sound discipline in the school. Also, since the teachers' salary is promptly paid, there will be no strike today, and strike tomorrow, like in the public schools. Another thing is that private schools employ "effective teachers". Applicants are tested before they are employed and the school management makes sure such an individual is suitable. But in public schools, anybody with a teaching certificate can be employed without an interview. Such teachers may not actually prove their worth, though they are trained teacher, and because they are employed on the basis of their certificates. Thus, any little discomfort they all go on strike. (8. 8. 94)

Dele is a trained teacher but specifically trained to teach in the junior high school but found himself in a private nursery school because he couldn't secure a job in a public school. According to him, most teachers in the private schools are efficient, even though they are not necessarily qualified and some are not trained at all. However, the concept of such 'efficiency' becomes a relative term or perhaps ambiguous. In a later conversations I had with Dele, his view seemed to have shifted to include publicly operated preschool programs.

> If the state government could try to establish nursery schools whereby the poor children would be able to attend, that would be perfect. For instance, if you have a child and you know that you are poor, and you cannot afford the private schools' fees, so it is left for you to take your child to the school that is free or that you can afford to pay the money. (14. 8. 94)

Dele therefore concludes that "children will benefit much more from the preschool established by the state government than the private ones." Another participant in this study expresses her dissatisfaction on the deplorable condition of the public schools in Ondo State. However, Betty suggests preschool programs should be publicly operated.

> The high rate of dropouts that we have in our educational system is uncalled for. Even when you talk to some grade six [certificate] holders they will be looking at you; hardly can they operate beyond the level of primary four! In those days when we were in school, primary six pupil [grade six] could manage a good store. In fact the first time I taught, I taught as a school certificate holder [high school diploma], and I think I taught in a Modern School [Grades 7 - 9]. I handled the situation well despite my little education. I teach literature in a college, at times when these students run out of assignments for you, I get to the class and say, 'I pray for the children that you will teach', because of their expressions. So, you now discover that if the preschool program is incorporated into the public educational system, it will perhaps help us a lot. I believe it will be of a great advantage to the nation as a whole. (15. 7. 94)

To summarize the findings of this section on preprimary programs, it can be concluded that all interviewees believe that public schools in the state have greatly deteriorated and are on the verge of collapse. Though most interviewees support preschool programs being publicly operated, the fear is the aftermath of the incorporation: (e.g. the frequent strike actions of the public school teachers, poor supervision and quality control).

An Appropriate/Ideal Preschool Program for Children in Ondo State

Whether it be in the so called 'developed' or 'developing' worlds, there are three dimensions that preschool education programs share in common: the philosophy, organization, and personnel. The variety of preschool education programs, however, is great. Throughout the last several decades, researchers have investigated which factors within each of these categories can be associated with the most positive educational outcomes. Apparently preschool education programs exist in an ecological milieu, their paths actually do interrelate. Most importantly, preschool programs in all societies should have a commitment to the well-being of young children. Apparently what adults believe about young children ultimately determines the way they interact with children, the kinds of environment they create for them, and the expectations they generate for children's behavior. Raphael pointed out that:

> Maybe it is time we should realize that Western education per se, without blending it to our [African] cultures, beliefs, and values will never do us good. Every society is different in one way or other. The fact that one program works for the Americans is not a guarantee that it will work for

> Nigerians. Our society, backgrounds, beliefs, values, and cultures are quite different. (14. 8. 94)

Some interviewees also expressed their beliefs that the child is the product of his or her total environment, and that a child's racial classification, his or her color or creed, are irrelevant factors with regard to mental ability, manual dexterity, initiative, originality, adaptability, flexibility, industry or energy for work, and so on. The interviewees pointed out that any program planned for the child must take into consideration the backgrounds and the environment of such a child. It was pointed out that the majority of the Nigerian population lives in the rural area. Therefore, a typical Nigerian child is to be found in any of the thousands of villages that span the Nigerian society and any large scale planning that is oriented towards the cities and townships is unrealistic and dangerous. The average extended family conducts its business in the tradition of its forefather and is either engaged in farming, fishing, trading, cattle rearing, working as blacksmiths, or a combination of any of these. Most families are illiterate. The average Nigerian child lives within this cultural environment and is educated to become a conforming member of this enduring, complex, and highly organized village society. The child, in turn, is expected to perpetuate the culture by passing on the same tradition to his or her own offspring. Prior to the twentieth century, village life continued virtually undisturbed and the people were tolerably happy. Today, some villages still enjoy this apparently happy existence. However, Nigerian society is in the throes of social ferment and the rate at which change is taking place is almost terrifying. Fafunwa (1980) pointed out that:

> Sometimes, some relatively quiet community suddenly becomes disturbed: some seek changes and some have changes thrust upon them, while some others are pushed into the twentieth century completely unprepared to meet the new challenge. (p. 15)

The old Western system of education which has been followed for many years suddenly becomes utterly inadequate to cope with the changing needs of the Nigerian society. University graduates become disenchanted with village life and wander into the cities for jobs, which often do not exist. The children are often alienated and divorced from

their environment; they shun agriculture and refuse to follow the trade of their grandparents. I remember my own elementary school days. I learned more about "Scotland Yard than I even knew about my father's yard." One interviewee said "our children roam about with an education that is useless; I wish parents would help us."

Through sociological and anthropological studies, we now know that a child's cultural background and socio-economic environment play an important part in his or her growth and development. In light of this Fafunwa (1980) says that:

> The average African child between the ages of three and six years is at a serious disadvantage compared with his [her] fellow in Europe or America, and it is during this particular period that a child's mental abilities develop very rapidly. He [she] is eager and curious. He [she] asks numerous questions about people, places and things around him [her]... Studies in child development have amply demonstrated that the kind and amount of social, cultural pressures which he [she] experiences, influence the extent to which he [she] will continue to ask questions. These will also determine the extent to which the child will value this method as a means of acquiring knowledge and information. It is this last point that poses a big problem in the education of the African child. (p. 16)

Apparently the average Nigerian parent still believes that the child is to be seen and not heard. This approach naturally stifles the child's curiosity and impedes the development of his or her reasoning powers. Some parents, especially those who are illiterate, tend to consider a three to six-year old's questions as an irritation or sheer impertinence. Many even regard them as bad manners which they try to "nip in the bud" by hitting the child. To make the situation worse, the child meets with even more rigorous resistance at the elementary school level. The teacher, who in some cases is either untrained or unsure or both, covers up his or her own ignorance by slapping down the eager child instead of giving encouragement.

Obviously this repressive tendency is due partly to the inadequacy of the teacher education program on one hand and the norm of the society on the other hand. Both must be drastically altered if the education of the child is to move along progressive lines. Fasa pointed out what she considers to be components of a good nursery school.

> Some of the things I will consider before I put my child in any nursery school are the availability of manpower in such a school. Are the staff

> qualified enough to educate young children? I will also consider the capability of the proprietor or proprietress. Is he [she] among those who say preschool education is another way of making money? I will consider the school philosophy and actual practice. Then I will go there and survey the environment to see whether the environment is good for the education of young children. I will also consider the availability and the appropriateness of the facilities, such as, buildings, instructional materials, space to play and other essential things. (7. 11. 94)

Kemi opines that an ideal preschool program should consider proximity of the school location to the child's home, good management, and the reputation or morale of the school.

> We consider proximity to our homes, because to take a child to the nearby school on taxi now cost almost twenty naira which some parents could not afford. Other people's opinions about the school is another thing that matter. Actually when you look at the things that you should first consider is the management. What is the exposure of the proprietor or proprietress? How does he or she understand nursery school education and how does he or she practice it? Then, you consider the staff strength and the types of facilities that are available. (15. 7. 94)

Dele pointed out what he believed to be an ideal, relevant, and beneficial preschool program.

> Well, one of the components of an ideal preschool program is the curriculum. The curriculum or the program should be well designed so as to suit the purpose [need] of the children and such program should not be designed outside the child's environment. Also the standard should be appropriate to the knowledge of the pupils. The physical environment of such nursery school should be conducive, rich and safe for the child. Enough playground, and other facilities should be provided. The staff should be trained and well qualified, especially in child development with African child's rearing practices as a prerequisite. (14. 8. 94)

The points mentioned by the interviewees could be summarized into three categories: the philosophy of the school, organization, and the personnel. All early childhood programs should share an ethical responsibility for enhancing the quality of life of children and families. However, there is no one early childhood program that best meets the needs of all children and all families. An important remark made by some interviewees is that the average Nigerian child comes from a home where the parents are illiterate. Consequently, there are no books for the child to read nor can he or she be read to. There are no toys, no simple or even complicated mechanical gadgets, and often virtually no evidence of modern science and technology within the home.

Most interviewees, therefore, believed that since the mind of the child is very impressionable at this stage of development, it is essential that a concerted effort be made to prepare the child for the rapid changes which are already taking place. The question then arises; how can we better prepare children than by creating an environment conducive to learning and development? Nigerian children of today are undoubtedly going to face greater challenges than those of their parents did. They will grow up in an age where science and technology have become indispensable instruments of social change. History has shown that science and technology are products of challenge as well as response, and that aptitudes for, and favorable attitudes to, the acquisition of these skills can be cultivated.

Some interviewees also believed that preschool programs should be relevant to the needs and the environment of the child. In other words, the education which should be emphasized during the very early stages is knowledge of their civic rights and their responsibility in relation to their immediate community, the nation, and the world at large. This will help children to quickly adjust to their ever changing environment. Among those characteristics which must be encouraged in promoting a scientific attitude of mind in the preschool programs in Ondo State are: curiosity, manipulative ability, and freedom from restriction. The curriculum of the preschool should follow the children's natural inclination. Perhaps the reticence or timidity exhibited by the average Nigerian child in the presence of adults, both at home and in the classroom, is largely due to the earlier restrictions imposed upon him or her. Mechanical comprehension, manual dexterity, enthusiasm, initiative, and reasoning powers are likely to have a chance to thrive if the adults will only allow children to try things out on their own, with safety as the only restrictive factor. In many parts of Nigerian societies the child's imagination is given little opportunity for self-expression, and there is undue pressure on the part of the adult to make the child conform to the accepted pattern of training so that the child will acquire the skills and knowledge that are considered fundamental to successful living in his or her own community. It is rather unfortunate that

the adult, while making the best of the new and changing Nigerian scene, is not always aware that the child will be maturing in a new and rapidly changing environment.

From both the data collected and the document analysis in this study, an ideal preschool program, as was suggested, should be one in which children's creative imagination and their urge to express their interests are encouraged via lessons on Nigerian music, Nigerian dancing, storytelling, role playing, painting, and science exploration. With intelligent guidance, children can be encouraged to create things that are new and different. This is the kind of opportunity that has eluded Nigerian children for decades.

In the Western hemisphere, unit blocks are to help develop greater manipulative powers, and there is no reason why the same sort of device, or something similar, could not be constructed for Nigerian children. Wood or other suitable materials abound within each state in the country and could be constructed into such toys as wooden motor cars, shovels, trucks, airplanes, counting beads and abaci (from bamboo trunk), dolls (from wood and rags), rattles, balances, and other educational objects. Clay or mud could serve as a fairly good substitute for plasticine in rural areas. These and other materials should be made available to children they will be more meaningful and perhaps make learning more relevant rather than waiting for foreign materials that may never come.

Some interviewees also pointed out what the contents of preschool programs should be if children in the state are to benefit. Obviously, children generally like stories and never tire of hearing them. The exploits of the proverbial tortoise, as well as human stories, fascinate them. They are curious about their environment, the people whom they meet, and natural phenomena. They want to know about the village shoemaker, the weaver, and a host of other aspects of their environment. Eating habits of people near and far, greetings, helping others in need, the story of the village, the market, the church or mosque, the masquerades, and the village festivals intrigue them. Both indoor and outdoor group activities help children to develop a spirit of cooperation and provide an opportunity for social development. Above all, the programs must be flexible enough to meet the needs of

each individual child and their community. The accent for this age group should be on playing not teaching, guiding and directing not formal instruction. Komi says "a good teacher guides and directs a child's learning experience but does not formally instruct." At this level of development, playing and acting are the child's most stimulating ways of learning.

In summary, this theme on what the interviewees considered to be the appropriate preschool programs for the children in Ondo State has outlined three main issues: the philosophy, organization, and personnel. No matter what the size of the organization or where it is housed, the best preschool education programs are characterized by strong administrative leadership. All the interviewees also believe that the teacher is an important cog in the wheel and without a well educated and qualified teacher, the nursery school program would be more of a curse than a blessing. One interviewee opined that "it is indeed better not to have a nursery school education at all than to have one governed by an incompetent, ignorant and unimaginative teacher." Therefore, this section reveals that high-quality programs are ones that can meet the developmental needs of the children. The ideal preschool program for the children in Ondo State encompasses a broad array of services developed in response to children's individual needs, family requirements, and community characteristics.

The Need for Privately and Publicly Operated Preprimary Programs

Most people interviewed felt that preschool programs should be publicly operated. Some interviewees even felt that the privately owned preschool institutions could be easily and effectively assumed by the public school boards. Those who felt that preschool programs should be a part of the public educational system also believed that the present provision and delivery of the private programs, did not meet the needs of the children. However, some interviewees believe that both private and public preschools should be allowed in the state. Yetty felt that private preschool programs may be unnecessary:

> But you still ask yourself whether it is healthy and appropriate to bring my innocent child under this unorganized and haphazard private school? They don't have infrastructures, they gather in the church premise so that when the congregation wants to meet on Fridays for the women's prayer meeting or other church activities, they demarcate all the place, the children will be singing and playing while the women also will be singing and praying. So, that is another area where people have used the sense of ingenuity to meet the preschool needs. (15. 7. 94)

Among those who supported both the private and public operators, the main argument put forward was the choice this option would provide to parents. Another reason given was the problems confronting the public school system. Suyi pointed out that:

> There is no equity anywhere in the world. All fingers are equal but they are more equal than others, [we are equally born but not equally talented] that is my belief. As far as education is concerned, even in other countries you have the public schools as well as the private schools. And usually the private schools are more costly than the public schools even in Ondo State the public primary schools are free. Definitely children of the elites will go to the private schools, while children of the low income people will go to the public schools because of their financial backgrounds. Definitely there can never be equity. But I still support both the private and the public nursery schools. (13.7.94)

Continuing in the same vein, Betty, maintains that both private and public nursery schools should be allowed in the state for the following reasons:

> There is the need for both private and public preschool programs in Ondo State. For instance, fingers are not equal, [we are not equally talented] we have different types of classes of parents, like the high socio-economic status, the middle, and the low classes. Some parents will not have the means to send their children to private school because of the high fee, so they may have the opportunity of sending their children to the public one. (26. 7. 94)

There were mixed feelings among those who believed that preschool programs should be operated by the public. Some felt that the public operation would be contingent on the improvement of the present situation in public schools, otherwise the incorporation may be fruitless. Joseph pointed out that:

> If the government can shoulder the responsibility of operating preschool programs, there will be no room for privately operated nursery schools. The private ones are so costly and not everybody will have access to it and the government wants equity and accessibility of every child to education. When I don't have money to eat, how do I get money to send my children to private schools where they pay high fees. But if it is owned by the government, then everybody will have access to it. I support that

> government should operate the nursery schools. They may have a section for preschool in the public primary schools. (11. 7. 94)

Some of the interviewees believe that preschool programs should be publicly operated and suggest a number of reasons to substantiate their beliefs. For instance it was suggested that the duplication of services by both private and public were unnecessary, very costly, and promoted inequality in the society. Dare noted that,

> It is not necessary to have any private preprimary institutions, because of the fee being paid by the parents. I think if such a thing should be organized it should be free for everyone, without any other thing attached to it . (2. 8. 94)

Adun believes that preschool programs should be a part of the public school system but the success depends on a proper monitoring system on the part of the government.

> If we can have preschool in our public schools, that will be perfect. It will be good because it will help every child to have a good start in life upon which the future success can be built. I do strongly support public preschool education. I think it is better that way and the only problem with that is whether the government will not be able to control them properly, that is, to have a good monitoring system. (22. 7. 94)

Dele feels that no matter which preschool you send your child to, what really matters is that the child receives good education and the end result is fruitful.

> So, if you are paying an exorbitant money and you are seeing what you are paying for, that your child is improving in terms of academics, you will be happy, rather than putting him or her in a mushroom school whereby he or she will not be able to express himself or herself. (8. 8. 94)

A similar opinion was shared by Betty when she pointed out that:

> Considering the importance of preschool education, I believe government should operate it, however, this depends on the money to maintain it. That is, if they are able to monitor the schools, the teachers, and all the necessary facilities are supplied, I think this will be great and perfect. (14. 8. 94)

As indicated earlier in this chapter, a lot of reasons were given by the interviewees for why they felt that preschool education programs should be publicly operated. Such reasons given included the children benefit, teachers and parents benefit, enhancement of equity and accessibility of all children, availability of facilities, effective organization, and the uniformity of programs.

Nevertheless, most interviewees felt that regardless of who operated preschool programs there must be an effective monitoring system; otherwise the programs would be fruitless. To ensure quality and consistency of preschool philosophies, this monitoring system should not only to apply to programs but to staff, facilities, and so forth. Some interviewees also believe that it would be more beneficial to the children if the preschool program were housed in public schools where the children could interact with adults, do things jointly, and have more access to the public school facilities. One interviewee said; "It makes little or no difference from a child who only goes to the farm with his or her parents when a preschool program is housed in a private isolated building instead of a public school building." According to him, some private preschoolers still experience "transition maladjustment" when entering public primary school. This is an interesting concept although this is yet to be investigated. Nevertheless, this topic like others raised in this thesis suggests a further area of study.

In conclusion, the majority of interviewees felt that preschool programs should be publicly operated. A number of reasons for this incorporation were also raised in this study. These reasons focused on equal educational opportunities for all children, availability of facilities, benefits to parents, teachers, and children, uniform programming, and an effective monitoring system. However, arguments were presented for both public and private operators of preschool program. The main argument here was the right of choice for the parents. This right appears to out weight the reasons to disband private operators. But most important, all the interviewees emphasized that the needs of the great mass of the population cannot and must not be ignored. For it is through education that the average citizen will be helped to cope adequately with the problems of his or her basic needs: food, shelter, clothing, maintenance of good health, management of economic affairs, citizenship role in the community, and family life. No country can expect to develop to its maximum so long as its masses remain ignorant, poor, and disease-ridden. Apparently, under-development is not only a physical state but also a state of mind.

Should Preschool Programs be Made Mandatory or Available for all Children?

Of the fourteen individuals interviewed and the group of the traditional leaders, only one interviewee felt that preschool programs should not be made mandatory so as to allow individual parents the right to choose whatever is best for their children. Two interviewees felt that the program should be made available throughout the state before considering the issue of making it mandatory. The interviewees gave several reasons why preschool programs should be made mandatory. Fasa pointed out that,

> Well, as far as I know, it is difficult for the working parents to leave their children at home and go to work or to the market where they sell things. They would prefer a place to keep their children rather than leaving them at home to many hazards. So, I would like it to be mandatory. I cherish the idea of making preschool compulsory in Nigeria especially in Ondo State. (11. 7. 94)

Sarah said her reason for making the preschool program mandatory was based on her personal experience with her children and because of the opportunities she felt preschool programs could provide children. She said,

> I strongly support that the preschool program should be mandatory in this state because all my children went through nursery and primary school, and we can see ages three to four pupils solving simple mathematical problems. This could bring the best out of our children. But if we allow the child to stay at home until six before starting school, that could be very damaging to the child. Whereas, early education could prevent a lot of damages to our young children. (18. 7. 94)

In the same vein, Adun said,

> If government takes over and makes it free, I think it might be appropriate to make it compulsory for young children. The preschool program will enhance the development of their academic performance at the early primary grades. It is very important that they make it mandatory, and to make sure these programs are well organized and supervised. (2. 8. 94)

Most interviewees felt that it would depend on who operates the preschool programs as to whether or not they should be made compulsory. They said if the preschool program were publicly operated, free, and made available both in the rural and the urban communities, then they would strongly support the idea of making it mandatory. But as long as it remained in the hands of private individuals, making it mandatory might be meaningless "it

is like making a law that we know it will be practically impossible to obey", says Komi. He said,

> If preschool is made mandatory with the present condition of things in the country without active involvement of government, such a decision will be fruitless. However, if government can start the preschool program, obviously, it will be free and common people will be able to send their children for preschool education. But if it is not made free or little charges are put on it, and it is made mandatory, most parents will just keep their children at home because you cannot force them when they don't have the money. (16. 7. 94)

Continuing in the same vein, Komi's response was provocative.

> The word mandatory seems too high because from the theory of needs, a person puts in everything into what he or she needs. If you look at the universal education in the country now, despite the fact that the federal government makes it mandatory, you see that even the children you send in there are not performing. Some of them have the luck of attending very good secondary schools, yet they roam about because they know there is more money outside the school than in the school. The only grace that we have is that the pupils who go into the nursery school are so innocent. So if we direct them well they will perform well. And from that perspective we can make nursery school mandatory. (4. 8. 94)

Komi's view as expressed above seems to be very distinct from what some interviewees believed. Komi believed that the success of the program, if made mandatory, might depend on the children. He supported his view with the care-free attitudes of the pupils in the public primary and secondary schools. Even though both primary and secondary education are free and mandatory, some pupils deliberately refuse to go. Instead, they prefer to roam the streets and look for some 'quick money jobs'. But in the case of preschool education, according to Komi, the hope lies in the fact that these children are innocent and they are always ready to explore their natural environment, therefore, it might be fruitful to make preschool program mandatory. As one interviewee said, "young children are more intrinsically motivated and enjoy schooling at that age rather than depending more on extrinsic motivation. However, this is debatable."

If the word mandatory "seems rather too high," I ask Komi whether the programs could be made available for all children in the state? Then he said, "available is one of the best words. It should be made available." (4. 8. 94)

I queried him as to why and how they could be made available?

> I think it should be made available because when an individual comes into the world he [she] comes with the little talent in term of brain and ability. Some of these things are hereditary, so when you give a person the maximum opportunity to use whatever God gives him [her] as a basis, that person is going to be a good citizen. So, if the preschool education system is made available to all, the implication is that everybody will have the opportunity to become best, so, those who are not best will not be the fault of the planners or the parents or the fault of the enlightened, matured society. Because I always look at education as the impact of the matured mind on the immatured one. So, the matured mind plans, the immatured one begins to bite from that plan and gradually get matured to the level to which his [her] ability can carry him [her]. So, if this thing [preschool] is made available it will give everybody the opportunity. So let the opportunity be available. (4. 8. 94)

Several of the interviewees shared similar views and said that to make the preschool education program mandatory would depend on whether the program was made universally available. According to them, availability of the program would be a great determining factor as to whether or not it should be made compulsory. Pekun pointed out:

> Now, we know the importance of preschool education as the foundation for all children. If we are to base it on academic performance, it should be compulsory, but in a case where we have some parents who cannot afford the payments [school fees], therefore, to make it compulsory will indirectly affect these parents. (8. 8. 94)

Pekun felt that based on the importance of the preschool program as a preparatory for future life, she unequivocally believed that the program should be made mandatory. She said,

> Yes, of course the preschool program should be made mandatory. Childhood period is regarded as critical because it is the stage of molding children lives in preparation for the future. Obviously, these children will later become adults or the leaders of this country. It is very important to take adequate care of their education at an early stage. So, it is important that it should be made mandatory so that at least every parent will send their children to preprimary schools. (26. 7. 94)

The only interviewee who said no to the mandatory requirement of the preschool program in Ondo State did so with caution. He questioned what would be the fate of the parents who could not afford the school fees or perhaps who have options for their children other than sending them to the compulsory preschool program. He argued that parents should be given the option to choose what they think is the best for their children. So, when responding to the question, Raphael unhesitantly says:

> No, it cannot be made compulsory because it depends on the ability and the choice of the parents. Some parents are not financially okay enough to send their children to any nursery schools. The parents might even know that if they send their children to the preschool program, they might be sent back because of financial problems. Also, I think parents should be given a choice of where to send their children, therefore, it cannot be made compulsory. (22. 7. 94)

The major factor which was stated against making the preschool program mandatory was once again choice. Another reason was the issue of availability or the inability of most parents to afford the exorbitant school fees if privately operated and at the same time made mandatory. Several reasons were given for its being made mandatory. Several of the interviewees believed that children who had been to a preschool program were deemed better able to handle the transition to primary school education.

In summary, the majority of the interviewees believed that because preschool is generally beneficial to children, it should be made mandatory. However, this also would depend on who operated the programs. If the program was made available and free, both in the rural and urban communities, then the majority of the interviewees believed it should be made mandatory. The interviewees felt that more effort was needed to make the transition to primary school education as smooth as possible. However, the right of parents to choose for their children was seen as being paramount by one of the interviewees who advocated that the preschool program should not be made compulsory in the state.

The Roles of the Government, Community, and Parents in Preschool Programs

The purpose of this discussion is to highlight some of the roles and the involvement of the government, community, and parents in the day-to-day running of preschool programs as revealed by the interviewees and document analysis. Several of the interviewees felt that government should incorporate preschool programs as earlier discussed in this chapter, but the question still remains whether to leave all the responsibility to government or to find ways parents and the community can be actively involved as well.

Some interviewees felt that to leave preschool programs solely in the hands of our government could be very disastrous and unfruitful if the programs are to be incorporated into the school system. Such is the case of the public primary and secondary schools that they feel are "in a mess" today. Therefore, all the interviewees believe that the government, community, and the parents should be actively involved in the running of preschool programs in the state. Several reasons were given some suggested ways parents, government, and the community could be actively involved. Fasa said,

> The government should control and finance preschool programs, not totally, the community and the parents should have their own share. The government should provide the facilities, the community may provide the sites, that is, the land where the buildings can be erected. The government now will employ the personnel, such as the manpower to take care of the pupils in the nursery schools. The government should supervise it, and never to leave it for the teachers alone. Both the organization and its administration should be decentralized. Apart from this, teachers' salary should be paid regularly. The community, including the parents will have their own contributions apart from supervising their children at home, occasional visits to the school is part of what will make it a success. Also in our system of education we have P.T.A. [Parents Teachers Association], we could see in some schools they donate buildings, vehicles, that is, buses to the schools. So, this practice should continue to supplement the efforts of the government. Parents and the community should have their share so as to make the program a success. (11. 7. 94)

Suyi also felt the government, community, and parents should share in the running of preschool programs in the state. Like other interviewees, they both believe that parents should contribute their "widow's mite" (little effort) even though there was a strong advocate for the incorporation of preschool programs into the public school system.

The documents obtained from the Ministry of Education as well as the National Policy on Education said little about how government should be involved in the day-to-day running of the program. For example, the policy only states the objectives of preprimary education and encourages private efforts in the provision of preschool programs. The statement made on staffing, regulations, and control of the operation of the programs was relatively vague. Now, in regards to the Ondo State regulations on preschool education, the guideline emphasizes the amount to be paid for inspection and approval of private schools to the state government. The guideline also specifies that the "Area Education Officer should

visit the school regularly for quality control purposes," but as one interviewee puts it "you can only see the inspectors going out to schools when there is a party." They feel the government is actively involved or concerned only when it comes to the issue of collecting money for renewal or inspection fees from the private schools. Though the Chief Education Officer disagreed with this, she gave no concrete reason for why the government collects the money without any corresponding assistance rendered to these schools.

Suyi pointed out how the government, the community, and parents could cooperate in making preschool programs a success and more beneficial to the children.

> The three organs [government, community, and parents] have a great role to play. In introducing preprimary education into our primary education system in Ondo State, first of all, the government has to formulate the policy, then, the policy does not come in isolation, the community, the parents, and the children have to be brought in into the policy. They have to be incorporated into the policy in such a way that the community itself and the parents also will see a reason for introducing this preprimary program into our primary education system. The government will seek their cooperation, because if a policy is made and the people do not cooperate, the policy will not work. So, one thing is to formulate a policy, another thing is to enhance the interest and the cooperation of the community in the successful implementation of the policy. So if the policy incorporating preprimary education into our educational system is to be implemented in Ondo State, there has to be several meetings; meetings of the community leaders, meetings of the P.T.A.[parent-teacher association] of the primary schools, then meetings of the preschool age parents, etc. So, the first thing is how these three bodies could cooperate and be actively involved in the operation of preschool programs. (13. 7. 94)

The point raised above by Suyi is very crucial, that is, to enlist the cooperation of the government, the community and the parents in the running of preschool programs in the state. Continuing in the same vein, Komi opines that:

> At this austere time both parties should work hand in hand. Let me start from the area of finance. The government should initiate the financing, but there are certain aspects which the parents will handle, especially aspects which remain there which the government will not take away. I don't see anything bad if government provides three classrooms and parents provide a few more. I don't see anything bad in parents providing chairs; it has been experimented and proved to be successful. Government can organize and get effective hands to manage our preschool education system, that is in the area of management and staffing; the government has that responsibility. The parents should occasionally visit the school, and they should be alert and know that it is also their duty to make the system run smoothly. Parents should also assist in observing and reporting of such observation to the appropriate quarters not just taking any teacher and say you are a bad

> teacher, that is not the way to do it. At best one might want to talk to the headmaster and say this is my observation and if the headmaster is reasonable, I think this will help the system. (4. 8. 94)

Much has been said in this chapter about the possible roles and the involvement of government in the provision of preschool programs in Ondo State. Most interviewees felt that government should operate preschool programs in the state, however, emphasis was placed on the possible involvement of the community and parents so as to make the programs more beneficial for the children and the community. In the area of community and parent involvement, some interviewees described how they could be involved. Fasa said,

> Yeah, I think the churches also should have their role to play. For instance, the clergymen can occasionally visit the school to pray or talk to the children, they can also donate books to the school. Also the philanthropists can donate or provide some amenities like playing material, equipment, chalks and other things that are needed in schools. The parents too can meet and provide whatever they think the school is lacking. (2. 8. 94)

A similar view was shared by Adun on the roles of the community and parents in the provision and running of preschool programs in the state.

> If community leaders can motivate their people, to know the importance of education and most especially preschool education, such will help its development. So like the Baale [clan chiefs], the high chiefs, and the kings will have to be involved, they can tell their people to enroll their children for preschool in their villages. So, and for the parents, I think they should be educated, because the first place of the child is the home. The parent should be a role model, and contribute through the joint efforts of the P.T.A. [Parent Teacher Association]. Parents should visit the school regularly and have their children's problems discussed with the teacher so that everything can be put aright. (20.7.94)

The points raised above emphasized parent and community education, and stressed that parents should be encouraged to take an interest in the program by working closely with the nursery teachers. The teachers, in turn, should do all they can to maintain a close relationship with the parents. Ways of establishing this relationship are: through parent-teacher association, regular visits to the school by the parents, and utilization of the parents' services as volunteer assistants to preschool school teachers. Parents can be of immense help to the head teacher and the classroom teacher because the parents have practical knowledge of their child's behavior patterns outside the school environment. Therefore, the

interests of both parties are parallel and cooperation between the two in the interest of the child is bound to be fruitful. If the parents have a good understanding of the preschool and its objectives, they can serve as community public relations personnel for the school. In most societies, parents are responsive to any group or individual taking keen interest in their children and the societies of Nigeria are no exception.

One interviewee was very specific about how the community could be actively involved in the delivery of preschool programs in the state. Kemi pointed out that:

> The community includes the parents also, they can cooperate with the government by giving them land, maybe by donating some amount of money so that they will start the construction of the land provided by the community. Again the community as a whole may decide to work on that land, because they may not have the money. Thus, they can provide the land and also work on the land, that is, to erect the school buildings. The community can help in the recruitment of teachers, such as retired teachers within the community can contribute their efforts, or volunteer to teach young children. (26. 7. 94)

Apparently with communal effort, the physical structure of the school could be erected under the leadership of a trained village builder. In many parts of Nigeria, the average village dweller builds his or her own home either with the help of his or her family or under a cooperative village building club or society plan. A mud building is relatively inexpensive, quick to erect, and cooler in the day than brick or cement. Practical experience has demonstrated that a good mud house can last for many years.

The nature of the community and the parent involvement as described by the participants in this study goes beyond the long-standing stereotypes (e.g. simply providing refreshments for school parties or attending the once in a year celebration or concert). The concept of parent involvement in the preschool programs as presented by the interviewees is more comprehensive, interactive, and collaborative than the stereotypical model. Therefore, involving parents in preschool education programs is a continuous process that incorporates parents in the total educational program, including the planning, implementation, and assessment phases. Kostelnik, et. al (1993) are correct when they opine that:

> Parents and teachers form an alliance in which they develop a common understanding of what children are like - how they develop, how they behave, the challenges they face, and how they can be helped to meet these

> challenges. The adults also come to a share conception of what "good" education is - what it looks like, how it operates, what it strives to achieve, what it requires, and what it precludes. When such alliances occur, parents and teachers actually learn together, providing mutual support to one another in their efforts to make life more meaningful for children and themselves. (p. 374)

These authors also suggest five major types of parent involvement, some of which I have discussed in this chapter. These major types of parent involvement are: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, and representing other parents (Kostelnik, et. al, 1993). Apparently, highly involved parents are more likely to support program policies, offer financial assistance, and rally community efforts to promote or maintain the preschool education programs with which they are affiliated.

In summary, this section of the study discusses the roles and the involvement of government, the community, and the parents in the operation of preschool education programs as perceived by the interviewees who participated in this study. Several of the interviewees support that preschool programs should be controlled and financed by the government, but both the community and the parents have a great role to play if the program is to succeed. The interviewees felt that both the practitioners and parents working together has become the hallmark of effective preschool programs. This section of the study has described a variety of strategies for increasing government, community, and parental involvement in the preschool programs in Ondo State. The strategies suggested under this theme are by no means all-inclusive but rather serve to highlight the broad repertoire of skill needed by teachers, parents, and all those who are involved in the provision of preprimary education programs. However, many questions still remain to be answered in terms of how to reach and involve all parents, especially the low-income and the illiterate parents who live in the rural communities. Perhaps our job as preschool professionals and researchers is to keep investigating alternative methods of community and parental involvement in the preschool programs and to welcome them as full fledged partners in the educational process.

How to Operate Preschool Programs in Ondo State

For the purposes of this study it was relevant and essential to include questions in the interviews on how to effectively operate preschool programs in Ondo State. A series of suggestions were given by the interviewees on this topic which eventually emerged as one of the major themes in the process of data analysis. The people interviewed gave many suggestions. Some suggested that the solution to the present preschool predicament lies with the government. One interviewee pointed out that the publicly operated Better Life Day Care centers should be upgraded to a preschool program. Another interviewee opined that more research studies should be carried out to convince the state government of the need for public nursery school. Some interviewees suggested the criteria for the selection of preschool teachers. It was also suggested that the government subsidize both public and private preschool programs. As well, the establishment of cooperative nursery schools was seen as a solution with community involvement, while another interviewee opined that the incorporation of the preschool program into the public school system should take the form of what he called "Innovation Adoption Theory".

Since the purpose of this study is to conduct a rigorous research study on how to improve the operation of preschool education programs in Ondo State, it is imperative to fully discuss the aforementioned suggestions made by the interviewees.

Toward the end of my conversations with Fasa, I asked her to suggest alternatives for how best to operate preschool programs in Ondo State. She said,

> The only solution to the preschool problem lies with our government. When everything is okay from the head, that is, from the federal government, down to the state, and down to the local governments, then, there will be no problem. Whatever happens over there [federal] will affect everybody and most especially our educational system. It is only our government that can channel everything properly, that can make education what it is supposed to be. My suggestion is that the federal government should take control of everything; preprimary, primary and so on. (11. 7. 94)

Another interviewee said that our government believes in "management by crisis", and "this is the style of the foolish people." He said our government should change its profile and embark on proper planning so as to prevent poor performance in the area of preschool

education programs. Like other interviewees, he called for the total overhaul of the program and solicited for government takeover.

In my conversations with the Deputy Director of Education in the Ondo State Ministry of Education, she pointed out that she was the chairperson of the task force for the Better Life Day Care centers in Ondo State. Suyi said before Better Life Day Care centers were set up in the state, they carried out feasibility studies of all the local government areas in the state, so as to identify the areas where the Better Life Day Care centers could be located. She suggested that a similar thing could be done before setting up preschool programs in the alternative, in which case the existing public Better Life Day Care centers could be upgraded to the status of preschool programs.

> I think these Better Life Day Care centers can be developed to that stage of preschool education because they are not privately operated day care centers, they are publicly operated day-care centers. They are being financed by the local government, and the fees at these Better Life Day Care centers are subsidized by the local government and they provide amenities for the day-care centers. So the market women just send their children to the Better Life Day Care centers, and at the end of their marketing in the market, they just go there to take their children home; and I think it is something to start upon in Ondo State. (13. 7. 94)

I did visit some Better Life Day Care centers in Ondo State to confirm her assertions about these centers and to see how they operated. I discovered that children from different homes, social, and economic statuses attended these centers. The centers were well funded, though the parents pay a token amount, teachers were trained and they constantly attend workshops and seminars organized by the task force committee. These centers also have appropriate facilities.

In addition, Suyi suggests that more extensive research studies should be conducted in the area of preschool education and its benefits so as to convince the government of the need for public nursery education in the state.

> It is a good policy if the government could make the preschool program one of its educational priorities. However, you have to convince the state government that giving preschool education will be beneficial to the children and you can do this by carrying out research studies on the children, particularly the children who go to primary schools via day-care and nursery centers. Then you carry on your research on children in the primary

> schools particularly Primary One [grade one], who were brought from home directly into Primary One. Then your findings will be able to convince the state government that this type of education [preschool] will be beneficial to the masses. (13. 7. 94)

The point raised above should be the case in an ideal society; an ideal society in the sense of a government that is responsible and accountable to the public. This is why Komi maintains that an imposed government believes it is not responsible to anyone and it does not believe in dialogue as well as a democratic way of doing things. Such is the case in Nigeria today. Komi goes further to say that "an imposed military government that scorns at excellence and tolerates shoddiness and mediocrity may not reason with the rational views of the masses, not to talk of the findings of a research study that will benefit the masses." Adun seems to be hopeful when she says "maybe in the nearest future when power will be transferred to the people such an effort may be fruitful - but who knows?"

Apart from the competitive and financial considerations, there are many altruistic reasons for providing the highest quality of preschool education program for the younger generations. The primary reasons should be to serve children and families in the most efficient and effective ways known to this field. In light of this, several of the interviewees pointed out some of the criteria to be considered before selecting teachers to teach in preschool programs. Dele believes that:

> The proprietor [proprietress] should go for this preschool program in any university to have a diploma or a degree course in it, before he [she] can practice. This will be better than just allowing anyone to establish a nursery school. For instance, if the proprietor or proprietress has the knowledge of preschool programs, he [she] will be able to provide the necessary things for the children because if somebody who is just wealthy goes ahead to establish preschool, and the teachers are doing wrong things, such an individual may be incapable of correcting and directing them. But if such a proprietor or proprietress has the knowledge of a preschool program, it will really help the school to function well. (18.7.94)

Teachers at the preschool level are usually expected to plan programs that support a broad range of developmental goals including social skills, language, cognitive, and physical development in a comfortable, play-based program. They are also expected to help children develop good health habits, confidence in themselves, and the ability to learn from their

experiences with others in a supportive environment. Apparently part of their job entails facilitating parental learning about children and parent-child interaction skills. These are highly sensitive and skilled jobs that untrained and inexperienced individuals could not effectively undertake, as pointed out by some interviewees. Soyinu suggested an alternative way of making preschool programs more effective in the state. He pointed out:

> I have some alternatives. You know what I discovered with my experience was that formerly I have the thought that those teachers that are trained, I mean those N.C.E. teachers[National Certificate of Education], Grade II teachers [Teachers' Diploma], then Education Graduates are the people that can put up their best in the preschool system. I later discovered that this was not true. (20. 7. 94)

Soyinu went further to say that most of these so-called trained teachers are not dedicated and committed to the well-being of the children they teach. Soyinu expects the teacher to be an epitome of morality, a model for the pupils to emulate, and a children-loving individual rather than just acquiring a certificate. He stated that whatever you do as a teacher will reflect on your pupils and as you are teaching the children you should be aware that these children are looking at you as their standard; for "like teacher like pupils", he concluded. He also said that those with only basic qualifications, but who have a special interests in children, could be given inservice training, workshops, seminars, and so forth in preschool education. He said this would serve as "on-the-job training" or "a form of teachers' training".

Another interviewee shared a similar opinion in regards to the criteria to be considered in the selection of teachers for the preschool program. Komi pointed out that:

> It is essential to look at the strategy to get the right persons [staff] to teach at preschool level. This is the area where you need a psychologist, sociologist, and a guidance counselor so that you don't employ the brilliant but apathetic person. A person who is brilliant but apathetic cannot teach children whereas the mediocre who knows how to pamper a child and say ah! ah!! you are doing good, you are doing great, now do it this way, such a teacher would get a lot of result from the learner. So, by the time you are choosing a teacher you choose the right person, definitely the system will run smoothly. (12. 8. 94)

The above statement does not suggest that preschool teachers should not be trained and well qualified, but rather emphasizes the need for commitment, dedication, and absolute love and

interest in meeting the needs of every child you teach. Apparently both teachers and administrators in preschool programs must constantly explore new ideas and practices in preschool education. Their role in the program is a critical one, including both leadership and support to others. In light of this, preschool teachers and administrators need specialized knowledge and skills related to young children, child development, and preschool teaching practices. They also need to keep abreast of developments in the field throughout their careers. Therefore, "well-trained" personnel are another key element in creating effective preschool programs in the state. Several of the interviewees opined that to develop particular preschool programs for Ondo State, variations in philosophy, program organization, and personnel have to be assessed as to their suitability and effectiveness.

Some interviewees also suggested that through community and parent involvement, cooperative or combined preschool programs could be established. Komi said,

> The society that will bring their pupils into that system should be carried along, and how do you do that? When you want to start a nursery school and it is a public school, don't tell the people that it is the government, or that you have sufficient money to do it. First of all, let there be an enlightenment program and make sure that they want it. Or do something to make them want it and if they want it let them know that they are the one who is going to do it. Believe me or not, when you know you are the one doing something you don't want it to fail. (12. 8. 94)

A similar opinion was shared by another interviewee. Both interviewees believed that cooperative nursery schools would perhaps be more effective than the privately owned ones in the sense that every member of the community would be actively involved and their interest enlisted. Dele maintains that,

> As a person, if I am opportuned to establish a nursery school, I will seek the opinion of the parents of that particular environment so as to know how we can run and regulate the school in terms of the fee, facilities etc. so that it will suit everybody. I will expect every parent to be involved and perhaps have a cooperative preschool, though a committee member among the parents could be chosen to run the school, the administration will be opened to everyone. So, if these things can be done I think we will have a good nursery school. (14. 8. 94)

Another interviewee felt that cooperative nursery schools could go a long way to assist the rural and working mothers as well as the economically disadvantaged ones who could not afford the high fees being paid in the privately owned nursery schools. Raphael said,

> I think cooperative preschool programs could be a reasonable solution at this time. At the beginning about three or five people can come together cooperatively and initiate the idea and draw more parents to themselves. This is better than having one private school here and there without sufficient infrastructure and amenities. But if parents within certain locations cooperatively establish one standard school, obviously it will have enough amenities and will be effectively run. Though there could be initial problems such as clash of interests or cheating, but the most appropriate thing to do now is to come together and establish a large preschool program where there will be enough materials to educate and teach qualitative education rather than learning with tears. Cooperation is the best thing, we cannot do it alone. "Two heads are better than one." (22. 7. 94)

The Deputy Director of Education, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, stated that the public Better Life Day Care centers could be combined or upgraded to nursery school status. In other words, several of the interviewees suggested combined or cooperative nursery schools. My further conversations with the interviewees on this topic revealed that this conceived idea would have been the most radical development in the preschool field. That is, the integration of day care and nursery education facilities into one single unit or a combined nursery center. This suggested a new form of provision that would appear to tackle the major structural problem which has undermined traditional services. A nursery school which offers full day care and nursery education to children in the full preschool age range would embody a comprehensive aspect which other forms of provision have lacked.

However, the question still remains, how effective would such a program be in overcoming the deficiencies inherent in separate services? The challenge involved in setting up the new preschool programs is a formidable one. While the concept of a combined nursery center may appears to be a logical, even obvious, solution to the problem of bringing day care and education together, it is equally clear that it is no easy task to fuse two functions which have been carried out for sometime in separate administrative and professional spheres. Preprimary schools and day care centers differ in their aims and practice, in the type and age range of children cared for, their financial structure, the

background and training of their staff, and their administrative framework. Nevertheless, the interviewees believe that the implicit goal of the combined nursery center is to provide, in a single unit, the 'best elements' of preschool education and substitute day care. The success of an innovation such as the suggested cooperative and combined nursery schools depends not only upon what goes on within these schools themselves, but upon the degree of coordination and cooperation which would be established between these schools and the parents. Apparently no model for change can be divorced from the leadership necessary to guide an agency as it labors to give birth to new vision and new direction.

Some interviewees suggested that private nursery schools should be assisted financially by subsidizing the school fees. Such an assistance could be in the form of subsidy or grants to the approved nursery schools, this would invariably reduce the fees charged to the parents and also improve the standard of the program. Raphael pointed out:

> The government should help in financing these private schools because nobody is sufficient on his [her] own. So if the government can have stipends or grants allocated to these private schools, obviously they should be able to operate more effectively. (20. 7. 94)

In the same vein, Dare said,

> I will suggest that government gives grants to the nursery schools, if grants are given it is only then that the government can lay down policies for these private schools: such as the type of persons [teachers] they should employ etc. And if they don't have any financial contribution, hardly can they [government] have any say. I believe parents should be made to pay a reasonable amount within their ability. Government can organize workshops for the nursery school staff and formulate policies on what these schools should do and possess so as to effectively educate these children and the community. (12. 8. 94)

Another interviewee, Joseph, suggested that the government should make grants or aids available to all the approved nursery schools in Ondo State. Facilities could also be provided and a thorough supervision from the Department of Inspectorate in the Ministry of Education.

During my last conversations with Komi, I asked him whether he had any suggestions as to alternatives or ideas on how best to operate preschool programs in Ondo State. His response was fascinating and could serve as vital information in the

implementation of a new idea; such as the incorporation of preschool programs into the educational system in Ondo State. The idea, or what he called "theory", was lengthy, therefore, only vital parts of the conversations will be quoted in this section of the thesis. Komi said,

> I will answer the question the way I could under this prevailing condition. In answering your question, I will refer to my thesis titled "Innovation Adoption". Incorporation of a preschool program into the public school system in our state is an innovation. The problem with most innovations is that they are "disadopted" at a later stage. Initially you think the idea is good, people buy it, before you know it they drop the idea; sometimes they drop it gradually. So, if we want this program [public preschool] to stay, we must plan an internal motivating strategy, so that there won't be a disadoption. And how do we start? (12. 8. 94)

Komi goes further to say that he saw me, that is the researcher, already initiating the innovation, and the role I was playing could be referred to as the role of a catalyst. "A catalyst may not know how to plan it, but he [she] has a strong feeling that that thing must exist. So, you are not supposed to be the only one." Komi explains how to effectively incorporate preschool programs into the public school system.

> So in this state [Ondo], you must gather people like you who are catalyst, who have a very strong belief that this thing must be done. Now they should team up and plan. And their first stage of planning should be to locate the resource linkers, they may not know the resource persons, but they must find a resource linker. Some of them incidentally may be resource linkers. So they will find those who have sufficient knowledge about the working of the preschool system, those who know and understand what nursery school implies. What should be packed in there, and what are the things that normally cause failure in the nursery school system. These are resource linkers, when you get them they will locate for you a resource person. You see now that we have got to three stages; from the catalyst stage, to the resource linkers, and to the resource person. (12. 8. 94)

Komi also suggests the type of curriculum that is relevant for preschools in Nigeria. One major area of his concern was the descriptive ability of preschool age children in Ondo State and Nigerian society as a whole. He believes that:

> It is good that a learner in the nursery school should be able to describe: from research on descriptive ability of preschool age children or preschool children, I discover that there is a culture in every Yoruba land [A major tribe in Nigeria] which prevents our learners to have a certain descriptive ability, and in planning a nursery school system, if you don't take care of that culture, you will eventually get pupils who will not be able to fit rightly

> into the society; what am I saying? If I see a person with a big eye balls as a Yoruba child and my father is not at home and when my father comes back and I say one man came to visit you, "he has a big eye balls." I will be spanked, and that will prevent me from describing the man effectively in the nearest future. So, in planning the curriculum, an unwritten curriculum which is the cultural milieu had to be looked into. (12. 8. 94)

The point raised above was similar to the childhood experience of the researcher, and is especially important when you come from a very traditional and illiterate home.

In conclusion, several of the interviewees suggested various ways of operating preschool programs in the state. They all felt that many children have needs that are unmet in the maze of current social problems, family changes, funding shortages, and educational priorities. In small and large ways, the parents, community, the government, and individuals can help create a society that makes children a priority. The future will undoubtedly continue to present society with challenges to be met if all children are to develop and meet their optimal potential.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion, Summary, and Reflections on the Study

A nation that scorns at excellence in plumbing because it is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will neither have good plumbing nor good philosophy. And neither its pipes nor its theory will hold water. (John Gardner, President of Carnegie Corporation, New York)

Background Discussion

"Anyone who is even slightly familiar with the state of preschool provision in Ondo State today will be aware that one of its most noted characteristics is its insufficiency, muddle, and irrationality", opined Komi. One indication of this insufficiency is the dearth of reliable national statistics indicating the number of preschool children receiving care and education outside their homes. An annual published list of registered preschool centers by Ministry of Education gives details of the total number of places available in officially registered services. However, little is known about the large number of children who attend these programs or the unregistered centers that are mushrooming all over the state. It is important to note that any figures relating to the overall level of provision varies from one area to another. All preprimary programs in Ondo State are, of course, non-statutory and, although policy statements and guidelines occasionally emanate from the state government, it is normally left to individual private proprietor or proprietress to decide upon the implementation of services. What is made available in each center reflects individual priorities.

Historically, any form of preschool provision owes its existence to a recognition that the family cannot by itself provide all that is required for the optimal development of its children (Olmsted, 1992). Such an attitude, according to Olmsted, is not only limited to preschool services, but has also long prevailed in the field of health care services. To fully understand why most of the people I interviewed support the national public preschool programs, it is imperative to discuss the socio-economic backgrounds of the families in

Ondo State, and in Nigeria in general. I will also link this with education and social stratification in Nigeria. This might give a clearer understanding of the beliefs and views of those who advocate the total commitment and active involvement of the state and federal governments in the provisions of preschool programs.

The Soco-Economic Background of the Family in Ondo State

This section is important because it reveals why preschool programs should be provided to every child in Ondo State. Over 70% of children in Ondo State are from less advantaged homes. The background of a child affects his or her success in school, even though the school has become an extremely important agent of socialization in Nigeria as well as other developing countries. For many children, school provides a transitional experience from the values and behaviors of traditional life into those required in the modern sectors of society. It teaches rural children how to live effectively in their community.

The term 'background' may refer to the genetic characteristics which either inhibit or facilitate the child's ability to learn or those factors which limit or enhance their potential. The other meaning refers to the social background or the people around an individual and in their socio-economic environment. Different kinds of experiences are associated with different socio-economic status; therefore, this may be reflected in ability differences. Socio-economic status is associated with a very complex number of variables. Environment is not a simple or one-dimensional thing, and socio-economic status is related to other family characteristics, such as family size. Generally speaking, the average family size in Nigeria ranges from six to eight. But among the most highly educated, families are becoming smaller. Onyabe (1977) has shown family size to be negatively associated with achievement in Nigerian school children. The social environmental factors that may affect a child include the occupational status of the parents, the parents' attitudes towards their children's schooling, and the expectations they have for their children. Apparently, a child from a higher socio-economic background has advantages over the child from the socio-

economically lower class family. For instance, in a higher class, there may be a television set, a radio, pictures, and reading and writing materials, all of which help to prepare a child for learning in school. In addition, the upper class child eats a balanced diet and thus has good health. The values the child is exposed to at home are similar to what he or she finds in school. Hence, the child is able to adjust easily to school life. A feeling of belonging to a comfortable social school environment further helps the child to demonstrate his or her abilities (DuBey, et al., 1979).

Over 60% of Ondo State population are illiterates and fall within the lower classes. Children from the lower classes are raised in conditions of greater restrictiveness. Control is more directly exercised. Both parents probably work and everyone must contribute to keep the family functioning. Resources are scarce; nothing can be wasted. There is little room for innovation or risk-taking; following set patterns is safer. In large, lower-class families such as we have in Ondo State, there is less time available for adults, who put in long hours of manual labor, to guide their children and allow them to experiment. A tight command seems to be the best way to manage in such a household. This type of environment could have adverse effects on the child, especially when most children in Ondo State do not enter school until they are six or seven years old.

Apart from the disparities in home backgrounds, there are also the disparities when children of different classes start schooling. Awoniyi (1988) maintains that in Ondo State, every child from the upper class receives a nursery education. This is in contrast to the overwhelming numbers of children in Ondo State who start primary school without having gone to any form of preschool program. The medium of instruction, which is English, is something strange to children with a disadvantaged background. Pictures and illustrations are things abstract and far removed from their environment.

Upper class children, who have had more advantages (e.g. private preschool programs, elite high schools, and so forth), have a better chance of being admitted to good quality post secondary institutions. The method of selection for these institutions may not

be according to ability, but rather to the social position of the parents. There may not be direct or obvious restrictions, but they do exist by implication. According to some interviewees, schools are not always located where they will be accessible to every citizen without expensive transportation. In Ondo State, some schools are reserved for the children of certain classes of people. There are 'capital schools', such as Federal Government Colleges, State Unity Schools, and Staff Schools, which admit only children of high-ranking officials and well-off families. These restricted schools have better facilities and more qualified teachers than public schools. Though they charge high fees, the facilities they provide are quite luxurious. Komi maintains that "good performances can be expected from children from among the upper classes who have had more advantaged homes, social environments, preprimary, and primary schooling." Thus children who attend the best schools have a better chance of attending post-secondary institutions and universities.

It follows logically, therefore, that when one has a poor educational background one has a limited chance of obtaining a highly respected and well paid job. The job, in turn, largely determines one's social class. Yetty opined that educational opportunities are not fully dependent on intelligence. It is important to remember that those who go to poor primary schools, even without preschool education, and later attend poor secondary schools do not necessarily do so because they are intellectually inferior. It is rather that they were not given the same social and educational advantages because of the social position of their families. Komi argued that "education as a social institution has fostered the existing hierarchical order not only in Ondo State, but in Nigeria as a whole."

Background of Preschool in Nigeria

The history of early childhood education in Nigeria can be traced to the preliterate era when fishing, hunting, and agriculture constituted the mainstay of the economy. Education at this time was informal, since there was no designated place or time for schooling, there were no timetables, textbooks, or other school paraphernalia. The mother or the

grandmother who cared for the children served as the teacher while others were working on the farm or elsewhere. The content of indigenous education was generally related to the practical life of the people rather than the memorization of abstract theories. The content had to do with interpersonal relationships as well as adjusting to the norms and mores of the community (Fafunwa, 1974).

In pre-colonial Nigeria, where a man was allowed more than one wife, it was unlikely that there would be many childless homes. Moreover, relatives would give their children to barren couples for them to raise. Nigerians had large families, partly due to polygamy and partly due to the extended family system. This system provided a learning environment for the young child. The family, like a public school, provided shelter and the members of the family would teach the young. However, what was regarded as 'proper' before the introduction of Western education in 1842 may not be regarded as 'proper' now. For example, children were not expected to talk during meals. This is contrary to the practice in modern homes, where children are encouraged to discuss their experiences at the family dining table.

Voice of Participants

Setting the Stage

The purpose of this case study was threefold:

1. To explore the beliefs and views of selected school administrators about the development of early childhood education and its possible incorporation into the public school system in Ondo State, Nigeria.
2. To explore the aspirations, values, and beliefs of selected preschool teachers and parents in a rural and an urban community about the present organization and administration of preprimary schools and the possible incorporation of preprimary schools into the educational system in Ondo State, Nigeria.

3. To explore what these school administrators, preschool teachers, and parents see as some of the merits and the shortcomings of this possible incorporation.

The pragmatics of primary data collection for this study were focused interviews and document analysis. The focused interview questions were open-ended which allowed free responses from the respondents some of whom were, or are still, involved in the provisions of preschool education in Ondo State. Fourteen individuals and a group of traditional leaders have been interviewed for this study; the six males and eight females were from a rural and an urban community. Data analysis took place during and after data collection and utilized "thick descriptions" in the interpretive research orientation.

Indigenous Forms of Preschool Education and Western Forms of Nursery Education in Nigeria

What kind of education was provided for children under six years of age before the introduction of Western education? And what was the aim of indigenous preschool education? How practicable is Western education to Nigerian society of today? What is missing in the Western type of preschool education in Nigeria? These are the questions I will address in this section of the thesis.

According to some interviewees, education in Nigerian traditional society centered on the overall development of the child mentally, socially, physically, and morally. It was a functional type of education or what Obasa called "education for self-actualization or self-reliance." The local community in general ensured the effectiveness of this process which enabled the child to fit into their society. The apparent aim of indigenous forms of education in pre-colonial Nigeria was to enable the individual to become a useful member of the community. Being a useful citizen meant that an individual had to acquire abilities to help himself or herself and the society in times of war and peace. Fafunwa (1974, p.7) summarizes the aim of traditional preschool education in Nigeria as "multilateral and the

objective is to produce an individual who is honest, respectable, skilled, cooperative and who conforms to the social order of the day."

Many people I interviewed suggested that an absolute Western education in Nigeria, without the integration of the indigenous forms of education, is not appropriate. Therefore, both the economic and educational sectors should be cognizant of the traditional education. Okeem (1980) maintains that education does not automatically lead to development. It is only when it helps to promote the goals of development that it can truly be said to lead to it. This then warns us that the goals of development should be clearly stated and understood before we can effectively assess education.

It is imperative to address the practicability and the usefulness of Western education in Nigerian's society today and whether it can promote national development. Again, what is missing in our educational system will be briefly discussed. Obviously, many problems exist in our society today. There is, however, the "invisible type of problem", the moral integrity of individuals graduating from a Western type of education in Nigeria. (Okeem (1990) Okeem (1990) states that:

> Human beings have body, mind and spirit. Education should address that total man [woman] and therefore it has to deal with those three areas of life. Man [human being] can be likened to a tripod whose three legs have to be so fashioned or developed that they should all rest firmly on the level ground in order to maintain balance or equilibrium and thus perform efficiently. Any distortion would inevitably lead to imbalance or disequilibrium to a greater or lesser extent. (p. 5)

The point raised by Okeem is similar to what some interviewees regarded as the problem confronting private preschools in Ondo State. Most interviewees believe that moral education is well rooted in the traditional forms of education in Nigeria. But with the present practices of Western system of education the moral integrity of those graduating is questionable. According to the "tripod" analogy of Okeem, it is possible that some graduates have stunted growth as they emerge from the Western educational system into the society. The reason for this is that education cannot be equated to schooling, nor can the possession of certificates be equated to knowledge and wisdom.

Based on the findings of this study, education (preschool included) can be seen as an integral part of development. For instance, one of the traditional leaders (Chief Obasa) I interviewed said that "most of us who are peasant farmers or with low income suffer from miserably poor food, housing, health and other physical conditions, and live in socially underdeveloped conditions with poor community life, especially in the rural slums." This calls for a more comprehensive and integrated policy for development. As part of this broader outlook, education can be seen as a vital strand in national development for a 'better life', which involves economic, social, and political aspects of life. As suggested by most interviewees, education (starting from preschools) needs to be redesigned; instead of suppressing human aspiration, education must develop the qualities of drive and initiative, self-reliance and optimism, the urge to experiment and innovate, and, above all, the desire to achieve.

Development is a comprehensive and dynamic concept. Development plans, to be most fruitful, must be oriented to the goal of a nation to achieve for the common people a fuller, richer, healthier, and better life. This view of development embraces all aspects of human, social, and economic growth (Hawes et al, 1990). Some interviewees maintain that educational planners, too, must understand what development means; they have to recognize the crucial role of economic growth in educational development, just as economic planners have to recognize that of education in economic growth.

Most interviewees maintain that formal education did not bloom in Nigeria because it ultimately led to the tradition of limited opportunities. It may not have encouraged development because the content of the curriculum had little or no relevance to the way people lived their daily lives. As Komi said, "The Western system of education has done well to introduce the print, but that does not alter the fact that the societies are still predominantly oral in tradition and have not yet developed a reading culture."

In conclusion, every sector of Nigeria is in contact with the outside world; therefore, the traditional societies are no longer intact and their socialization techniques have been

turned upside down. Neither a simplistic call for a return to Nigerian traditional education, nor a naive condemnation of Western intervention is realistic today. Societies' structure and culture may seem generally stable, however, they are constantly changing. Okeem (1990) opines that for a serious analysis we must see problems from a global perspective.

Incorporation of Preschool Programs into Public Schools

Analyzing the issues surrounding the incorporation of preprimary education into the public school system requires an examination of issues raised by the interviewees in this study and by related literature. These issues include benefits of preschool programs in public schools, providing high quality and appropriate programs, the population to be served, equity and accessibility, funding sources, and teacher qualifications.

Zigler (Strother, 1988) suggests we should "think of two major systems within the school building. One system is the formal educational system that we have today, and it won't change. This system will remain in the hands of educators, and they will continue to try to improve it as best they know how" (p. 75). The second system, according to Zigler, is the preschool program, composed of child-care centers, outreach services, and referral systems. In other words, each public primary school will contain a center equipped to provide a high quality, all-day program for preschoolers. These ideas are similar to some of the suggestions raised by interviewees in this study.

Zigler predicts three kinds of outreach programs because "not all families' needs are going to be met in the school building" (p.75). One kind of outreach program will offer support services for new parents. A second kind of outreach program will coordinate and monitor all the local facilities that provide day care for children from birth to age three and will provide training support for workers in facilities. A third kind of outreach program will provide information and make referrals for parents who have problems related to health, education, or social services. Zigler believes that preschool should be a state responsibility and subsidized by the federal government.

The views expressed by Zigler are quite similar to those expressed by the Deputy Director of Education in Ondo State during our conversations. Both suggest that the federal government support at least one pilot preschool program within the public school system in each state. In their opinion, we must work preschool programs into the structure of the system rather than expect the private sector and churches to continue to take care of the program. In Zigler's view, the public schools are ideal places for preschool programs because they are permanent, reliable, and close to home.

A close coordination between the preschool center and the host public primary school is essential. When there is continuity between the two programs, the young participants benefit. Zigler states, "you can run a terrific early childhood program, but if you send the children from that program into a rigid, highly structured elementary program that differs considerably in philosophy and approach, it's bound to be a hard transition for them" (p.75). Zigler maintains that we have the knowledge to put this vision into effect immediately, if only we could gain access to school buildings. "We can't allow battles to stand in the way of putting together a logical system that combines two of the basic needs of children - education and child care" (p. 75).

The information gathered in the course of this study points to the need to redefine our national conception of public responsibility toward children; providing a basis for an equitable and rational national policy toward families is a central issue in early childhood education (broadly conceived to include such areas as child care, pre-schooling, kindergarten, and parent education serving children from birth through age eight). In Nigeria, educational reform remains high on the public agenda, although support for educational services to the young is still in an infancy stage. All the demographic projections suggest that the forces driving toward greater commitments to early childhood education - working mothers, single parent families, greater emphasis on academic achievement- are likely to grow. They certainly will not diminish.

The issue of concern here is not so much whether the efforts to increase the provision of preschool programs through national and state policies will be successful, but rather, with a fuller conception of early childhood education can we alter how we think about children and families. The bottom line is how rethinking our social responsibilities toward children will allow us to develop richer conceptions of family life by opening up the boundaries of the closed nuclear family, and by revising our long-standing hostility toward maternal employment. If well conceived and implemented, a fuller conception of early childhood education can generate a more positive vision of public programs, rather than viewing them as necessary only for those who fail or who are the victims of tragedy.

These are all possibilities, however, they will not come easily. Based on the findings of this study there remains some individual and group opposition within Nigerian society to expanding early childhood education. Some vehemently oppose maternal employment and believe that women should stay at home and take care of their children. Most professionals still argue about the kinds of programs that should be offered to young children. There is also an ongoing debate about the efficacy of preschools within public schools. Grubb et al (1988) believe that beyond these fields of battle is a larger set of historic assumptions about the relationship of public policy toward families and young children that needs to be revised.

Nigerians in all corners of the country are echoing that the government should "give our children an equal start." Based on the findings of this study, preschool education is seen as an opportunity to move quickly and successfully up the academic achievement ladder, and the proportion of parents seeking it for their children will definitely go up.

Also, the trend of mothers' working in paid employment appears irresistible. Most women with preschool age children in Nigerian society are now engaged in some kind of work outside their homes. As mentioned earlier in this study, the proportion of women in the work force has been rising since independence in 1960. So, working mothers are no

longer an aberrant or deviant phenomenon; therefore, the dilemma of what to do with young children while mothers work is not going to go away.

In addition, the Nigerian masses are asking the educational system to look for ways to incorporate preschooling into its mandate. This idea was strongly supported in this study by most interviewees. The broad array of social problems suggest the need for closer collaboration between schools and families. During my interviews with some school administrators and preschool teachers, it was suggested that unfilled classrooms in the public schools might be used for preschools. Whatever the results of the people's agitation, the current debate about the efficacy of preschooling is likely to result in greater efforts to get children into early childhood education programs.

Lastly, it seems likely and inevitable that the social and political concerns linked to poverty will also increase. This study revealed that the Nigerian populace sees education as a solution to their economic problems. During my conversations with a group of some traditional leaders and peasant farmers in a village in Ondo State, one of them said; "The future is very bleak for farmers like me with crude farming methods; this type of farming is not even sufficient, and that business needs a lot of capital. The main hope for improving the lots of farmers such as me, is to send at least one son to school. A good education for one son means better chances for a steady, secure job that fills your stomach."

In conclusion of this section on preschool programs in public schools, I would like to say that gone are the days when neither schools nor other community agencies show interest in early childhood programs of high quality for young children. Based on the findings of this study the situation is beginning to change dramatically. It is therefore time for the public schools to respond. This study reveals that a convincing case can be made for the development of quality early childhood programs in local schools. Most public schools already have the basic facilities which meet the state and the local codes. Many public schools have qualified professional staff who can provide the human resources necessary for exemplary early childhood programs. They also have well established connections with

the parents, local government, and other community agencies. Public schools also have in place procedures for hiring and supervising employees, providing benefits, and other support necessary for a successful program.

According to my investigation, many communities and local public schools have relationships with colleges and universities (unlike the private schools) that can make available the latest research to early childhood education staff. Many public schools also have credibility in their local community. As well they have access to public resources and media; which are both essential an early childhood program. Most importantly, early childhood programs in public schools provide a logical progression for the young child from preschool or nursery school to kindergarten and the early primary grades. This opportunity allows the public schools, in turn, to consider the young child's long-term development.

During my interviews with several people in Ondo State, some interviewees expressed their doubt on the effectiveness of the public schools to establish preschools. The major reason for this doubt was the incessant strike actions of the public school teachers as a result of the non-payment of their salary, which eventually led to the closure of schools. On the other hand, the ugly situation was caused by the political crisis in the country. All this fuel is an assertion that since the public schools have ruined both the primary and secondary education, they cannot be trusted with programs for preschoolers. On the basis of majority opinion, and by outcomes from public schools, this assertion has been negated. At the outset, it must be recognized that Nigerian public schools are charged with the responsibility of educating all children, regardless of academic ability or inclination. Despite the criticism of public education, most parents are optimistic about its future because most parents want a strong, responsive, quality public education system for their children. Again, preschool programs are cost-effective, particularly for disadvantaged children, and lead to substantial long-term saving for society. In addition, early childhood programs meet the new needs created by dramatic changes in family life, changes that will not disappear and that require

new services if we are to maintain or strengthen the stability of families. Conclusively, our young citizens have an equal claim to the attention and resources of our society. It is both fair and just to make them available in the so-called "Nigerian egalitarian society."

Providing High Quality and Appropriate Programs

The major challenge we might be facing as educators, parents, and community members is the provision of successful and worthwhile early childhood programs. This requires careful examination of many controversial issues such as teacher preparation, instructional strategy, funding, program goals, and the masses to be served. Some people refer to education as academic skills instruction, while they regard preschools as custodial and protection services. Caldwell (1986), however, points out that high quality care services include educational components. The central question that comes to mind is, what type of program is appropriate for preschool age children? Warger (1988) maintains that,

> When the artificial distinction between education and care is removed, public schools can provide children with an experience-based program that includes individual and group activities, structured and unstructured play, time for listening, sharing stories, resting, and the opportunity to be in a safe and stimulating environment for as long as their parents are at work. (p.102)

Although there are many types of early childhood programs, most high quality programs share common characteristics. Cheever et al. (1988) quoting one of the documents of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), defines a high-quality program as "one which meets the needs of and promotes the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of the children and adults... the parents, staff, and administrators who are involved in the program. Each day of a child's life is viewed as leading toward growth and development of a healthy, intelligent, and contributing member of society" (p.44). Cheever et al. suggest four determinants of such a program: group size, qualification and training of staff, stability of care, and adult-child ration. If the purpose of preschool programs is to promote children's all-round development, they must be conducted by competent child development professionals who establish a non-directive

environment that supports children's active learning. But when quality is sacrificed to serve more children, the value of the program may be seriously undermined.

According to some of the participants in this study, another important criteria for a high quality of preschool program is its relevance to Nigerian society. This point was emphasized by most of the people I interviewed. For instance, Komi said;

> Maybe it is time we should realize that Western education per se, without blending it to our [African] cultures, beliefs, and values, will never do us good. Every society is different in one way or the other. The fact that one program works for the Americans is not a guarantee that it will work for Nigerians. Our society, backgrounds, beliefs, values, and cultures are quite different. (14. 8. 94)

Again, it is important to note that quality or appropriate early childhood education takes many forms, and quality programs may have different philosophies, goals, structures, and settings. Obviously, there is no set formula. Generally speaking, preschoolers need opportunities for socialization, cognitive development, creative expression, and physical activity. Preschool teachers know that play is an effective medium for learning and it helps children become more self-assured and independent.

In addition, quality programs should address the needs of adults. For instance, most interviewees maintain that preschool teachers need ongoing training or self-development with decent wages and benefits. The parents of young children need frequent communication and collaboration with the staff concerning the events of their children's lives. Another major point is the issue of the cost of such programs. Quality preschool programs are labor-intensive, requiring the energies of knowledgeable, committed, and positive people who deserve appropriate salaries. "If cutting quality in early childhood programs is a grave and expensive mistake, then, the absolute absence of it is sacrilegious", Yetty opined. Indeed, many interviewees argue that the care and education of the young should be our highest priority because they represent the future of our society.

Who Should Attend?

The important issue here is whether or not public preschool programs should be limited to children who are at risk of academic failure; that is those who are economically disadvantaged or have special needs. While it is appropriate to serve at-risk children first, it is important to include other children as soon as possible. Many research studies have been conducted with at-risk populations, but a few studies have also demonstrated positive effects without regard to socioeconomic status (Schweinhart et al, 1993). In fact, there are educational advantages to mixed socioeconomic groupings since young children learn from one another (Johnson et al, 1985). This decade has witnessed calls from many early childhood professionals to make preschool programs available and accessible for all children. It is the opinion of Grubb (1987) that the best programs provide an integrated setting with children of various racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

A similar issue is whether preschool programs should be voluntary or mandatory. Some of the people I interviewed felt that there was a need for two types of preschool programs within the state, that is, both privately and publicly operated programs. There is a paradox in regard to preschool programs being mandated in the Ondo State. As noted above, some interviewees did not feel that it should be mandatory; yet on the other hand each one of them was able to cite a number of advantages to being incorporated and to being mandatory. Some interviewees maintain that even if mandatory preschool programs were feasible, parents should retain the right to decide whether their children should attend; and whether they want their children in a public or a private program.

Generally speaking, the issue of who should attend preschool programs could be a point to be considered in certain circumstances, but in overall, preschool programs are a necessity and the inalienated right of every child. This leads to the issues of equity and accessibility of all children to preschool programs without any artificial restrictions. Why is this point so essential? Research studies have shown the relationship between the availability of preschool programs or child care and women's access to equal opportunity in education and employment (Thorman, 1989, U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1981).

These studies found that a significant number of women with children are without resources and face difficult barriers in trying to attain independence for themselves and their children because of lack of preschool programs or child care. Consequently, women do not have equal opportunity with men. For instance, women are expected to take full responsibility for the care of their children, but little attention has been focused on the problems that they face when they must also find employment to support their children. Thorman (1989) explains that:

> Norms of work life have been developed to fit the uninterrupted-the male-career. Women cannot match this pattern, because they interrupt work life to bear children and to care for them. Women's work lives proceed at a different rhythm from men's. They are marked by interruptions for pregnancy, maternity and child care. In a world of work fashioned and fitted to men, these interruptions handicap women in finding jobs, retraining and being considered for promotion, that is, for the rewards attractive in economic life. (p. 99)

The consequences of inadequate preschool programs or child care services are not only borne by young children, but also by their mothers and by the society as a whole. This situation is tragic because it reinforces the idea being echoed in Nigeria, that you can have either a career or a family, but if you are a woman, you can't have both.

Funding Sources for Preschool Programs.

A crucial, critical, and fundamental issue in establishing and expanding public school programs for preschoolers is who will pay. Obviously, everyone pays, however, the real question is who pays, how much, when, and for what. There is no doubt that it costs a significant amount of money to educate and nurture young children. As indicated earlier in this study, an early expenditure is highly beneficial later because it costs much more to remediate later and to address the problems of crimes, under-education, abuse, dropouts, welfare, and other social ills. Based on the findings of this study, private enterprises and parent fees are not sufficient to fund preschool programs, especially in a society where most people have low incomes. Therefore, most interviewees suggested that the major funding sources for preschool programs are federal, state, and local governments.

In recent years, issues of financing have moved center-stage in debates over education in Nigeria and in less developed countries while diversification of the sources of funding has been widely advocated (World Bank, 1986). The initial impetus for this recommendation has largely resulted from budgetary stringency experienced by central governments in most less developed countries. Increasingly, however, the argument is also made that these changes are likely to increase efficiency, and not necessarily at the expense of equity. There is a tendency to suppose that financial diversification will necessarily increase the total resources for education. Analyses of the diversification of financial sources in Nigeria in terms of the impact on total resources and on educational provision, efficiency, and equity have been relatively few (Lewin, 1987; Bray et al, 1988). The issues and forms of analysis required are complex. In Nigeria, the diversification of funding of education is closely linked to some form of administrative decentralization.

Nigeria is a federal country and as such no level of government has absolute sovereignty. The starting point for any discussion of either preschool or primary school financing in Nigeria has to be an understanding of the constitutional responsibilities for education held by the three tiers of government (federal, state, and local) and the necessary financial arrangements. In Nigeria, distribution of grants are of two types (a) between the Federal Government, all state governments and all local governments - a vertical distribution, and (b) between the 30 state governments and the 301 local governments - a horizontal distributions. The formulae used for the distribution of revenues changes from time to time.

The Third National Development Plan 1975-80 stated that "from (September 1976)... primary education will be free and universal throughout the country" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1975, p. 244). Until the launching of the universal primary education program state governments had been used to provide all finance for primary schooling. However, as a Federal Government initiative, and one established during a period when very large oil revenues were accruing, the Federal Government assumed full financial

responsibility for the scheme and its various ramifications. The funding took the form of grants to the state governments of N35 per pupil and N3,500 per classroom.

The new Constitution enacted in 1979 removed primary education from the concurrent to the residual list of functions and in 1981 the new revenue allocation formula resulted in state and local governments receiving an increased proportion of centrally collected revenue. Depending on the government of the day, the financing of primary education in Nigeria is relatively unstable as a result of constant changes in the formulae used in the distribution of revenues. The question is, how do we finance preschool education in the face of all this instability? Could the federal, state, and local governments be responsible for the financing of preschool education if incorporated into the educational system? All the respondents interviewed in this study indicated that as long as primary education is free, then, there is the possibility for the government to fund preschool programs if incorporated into public school system.

According to Komi, "it is unrealistic to expect any one source to bear the costs of providing high quality, comprehensive programs." He further states that collaboration in terms of planning, funding, and using resources efficiently among federal, state, and local governments will be essential in reaching families who want and need high-quality early childhood education and care for their children. Local coordination, as well as the flexibility to utilize community providers, is imperative in stretching the available resources to reach the greatest possible number of children.

As suggested by some interviewees, other sources of funds are public and private employers who have a vested interest in supporting the development of high quality programs for the children of their workers. It was also suggested that a special appeal funds could be launched to generate the initial money for the programs. An example of this was the recent Family Support Program (FSP) appeal fund that was launched in November 1994, in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria by the wife of the Head of States, Mrs. Maryam Abacha. Over N400m was collected at the launching. It was interesting to note that the

speech by the Head of States during the occasion was based on "family as the nucleus for national development." He emphasized that children must be encouraged to have early learning and that Nigeria must find the ways and means of ensuring and sustaining this quest through family and early education and care.

Funding of programs for young children should be designed to complement and support families, not to replace family responsibilities. As mentioned earlier in this study, some interviewees suggested cooperation and active involvement of the government, parents, and community in the provisions of preschool programs for the young children. A sliding fee scale is one way to accomplish this goal. Parent or community involvement could be in the form of voluntary services with contributions being either in cash or in kind.

In summary, with preschool programs left in private hands, many people wonder how the goal of giving the children an equal and early start will be realized. It is obvious that the gainfully employed and others with high sources of income will have to dig deeper into their pockets. On the other hand, the majority of Nigerians, especially in poor and rural communities, will have to pray and keep their fingers crossed in the hope that their children will succeed when they start their formal education.

Teacher Preparation for Preschool Programs

The participants in this study maintain that no matter how good an educational policy is, the successful implementation depends on the right type of teachers. So, the success of any program depends on its teacher education program. A common false assumption or myth about early childhood teachers is that "the younger the child, the easier the job." This statement could not be more inaccurate in the eyes of those who have studied effective early childhood classrooms. Seefeldt (1985) describes a preschool teacher as an active professional who is constantly observing individual children within the group, challenging students to investigate and explore, asking the right questions to help build vocabulary, and encouraging children to develop their skills in problem solving and thinking.

The Nigerian National Policy on Education, under Teacher Education Section, states that "Teacher Education will continue to be given a major emphasis in all our educational planning because no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers" (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, p.38). The policy enumerates the purpose of teacher education, which includes:

a) To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our education system;

b) To encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;

c) To help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives;

d) To provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in the life of their country, but in the wider world;

e) To enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981, p. 38)

The policy, under section 59, affirms that "all teachers in our educational institutions, from preprimary to university, will be professionally trained. Teacher education programs will be structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties" (p.38). Under the preprimary section of the policy, it states that provision will be made in Teacher Training Institutions for student teachers who want to specialize in preprimary education, and to "ensure that the main method of teaching in the preprimary institution will be through play, and that the curriculum of Teacher Education Colleges is appropriately oriented to achieve this" (p. 10). The Ondo State Government recently set the minimum qualifications for elementary school teachers as a University Bachelor's degree in education; every effort is being made to ensure the fulfillment of this guideline. But because early childhood education is left in the hands of private individuals, the quality control in terms of qualified teachers is inaccurate.

As suggested by most interviewees, when determining selection qualifications for early childhood teachers either in the private schools or in the public schools (if incorporated

in future), administrators must make every effort to ensure that these teachers hold comparative qualification with other teachers. Candidates should hold a four-year degree and teaching credentials from an accredited higher education institution. It is also essential that early childhood teachers have specific training in early childhood education or child development, and supervised practical experiences with young children.

Summary of the Study

The analysis of the data may be summarized as follows. In regard to the development of preschool education in Nigeria and in Ondo State, several interesting issues were discovered. It was generally felt that prior to the National Policy on Education in 1981, which gave a legal status for preschool education, there had been a great demand for more preschool programs in the state, especially from the middle-class women who were engaged in public work. However, little or nothing was mentioned about parent involvement, pressure groups, and other organizations in the development of preschool education.

In regard to the other areas of inquiry in this study, most of the participants believe that the present organization of the preschool programs is inappropriate because there is no quality control and not all children have access to the program. The majority of interviewees believe that preprimary programs require more than the involvement of the parents. They said that the local and state governments, as well as voluntary organizations, should be actively involved in the organization and administration of preschool programs.

On the importance of preschool programs in Ondo State, the interviewees maintain that: preprimary education affords parents (especially the mothers) the opportunity to work; preprimary education enhances both the intellectual and social development of children or what some interviewees call "sound education"; preschool education serves as a preparatory program for formal schooling; preschool programs enhance a smooth transition from the home to the school; preschool programs are seen as a status booster; preschools enhance the

child's adjustment to school; and preprimary education encourages the development of self-confidence in the children.

Though the interviewees affirm that preschool education programs in the hands of private individuals suffer more disadvantages than the advantages, most of the participants acknowledged the inherent advantages of the private nursery schools. Despite the importance of preschool education, some of the interviewees said the problems with the private preschools are so numerous and obvious that the advantages become almost invisible.

In response to the issue of whether preschool programs should be incorporated into the public school system the interviewees felt that preschool programs in the public school system would benefit children, parents, and teachers. These benefits would be in terms of wages, security of job, access to professional and self-development, and allows for equity and accessibility for every child. The overall impression of the interviewees was that each of these areas would be better dealt with if preschool programs were part of the school system. However, some interviewees felt that privately operated preschool institutions have a more informal administration that could easily make decisions; unlike publicly operated programs. Despite the discrepancies envisaged if preschool programs became publicly operated, a majority of the interviewees strongly supported the incorporation and the centralized preschool administration. The centralization was seen as a way of making preschool programs more consistent, more egalitarian, and more efficient.

In regard to the interviewees views and beliefs on the present situation of public schools in Ondo State and who should be operating preprimary programs, all interviewees believed that public schools in the state have greatly deteriorated and are almost on the verge of collapse. Without any immediate intervention to ameliorate these discrepancies, the incorporation of preschool programs may as well be a disaster. While most interviewees believed that preschool programs should be publicly operated, the fear is the aftermath of the incorporation. They also believe that public schools in Ondo State are faced with numerous

problems and these problems are connected with one another. Some interviewees maintain that the unstable political and economic conditions in the country are the basis of these problems. Others believe it is the care-free attitude of the government, especially to education (i e failure to pay teachers' salaries for months, lack of infrastructural facilities, poor supervision on the part of ministry officials, dropouts, and deteriorating standards of education).

In regard to what the interviewees considered to be the appropriate or ideal preschool program for the children in Ondo State, their responses reveal that high quality programs are ones that can meet the developmental needs of the children. Thus, an ideal and appropriate preschool education program for the children in Ondo State encompasses a broad array of services which respond to children's needs, family requirements, and community characteristics.

In regard to the issues of whether there is need for both private and public operators of preschool programs in the state and whether the programs should be made mandatory, the majority of interviewees felt that preschool programs should be publicly operated. A number of reasons were raised in this study. These reasons focused on equal educational opportunities for all children, availability of facilities, benefits to parents, teachers, children, uniform programs, and an effective monitoring system. Which arguments were presented for both public and private preschool programs, the main argument for this position was parents' right of choice. The right of parents to choose was also cited as a major issue against mandatory preschool programs. But most important, all the interviewees emphasized that the needs of the great mass of the population cannot and must not be ignored.

In regard to the roles of the government, parents, and the community in the provisions of preschool programs in Ondo State, all the interviewees strongly believed that the government, community, and the parents should be actively involved in the running of preschool programs in the state. Several interviewees felt preschool programs should be

controlled and financed by the government, but that both the community and the parents have a role to play. The interviewees felt that both the practitioners and parents working together has become the hallmark of effective preschool programs.

The final area of the study dealt with some of the suggestions raised by the interviewees on how to effectively deliver preschool programs in the state. They all felt that many children have needs that are unmet in the maze of current social problems, family changes, funding shortages, and educational priorities. They felt that the parents, community, and government can help create a society that makes children a priority.

Based on the findings of this study, the future of early childhood programs in Ondo State and in Nigeria as a whole can be summarized in two words; growth and uncertainty. In the midst of the growth, uncertainty is probably the best general descriptor of the current state of preschool programs in the state. Several crucial and critical issues remain to be solved: What will be the goals, content, and process of programs for ages 3-5; how will we fund, deliver, and determine who attends programs for 3-5 year-olds; and how will we ensure quality in our preschool programs? Most interviewees maintain that it is imperative that preschool programs be made part of our public school system in Ondo State, so that those who administer preschool programs can take the broadest possible long-term perspective in defining and addressing programming challenges.

Our first and most important challenge is to make preschool programs available and accessible to all children in Ondo State; and next we need to focus on the individual needs of the young children we serve. We can provide the resources and opportunities to meet those needs. Specifically, public schools (with preprimary incorporated) can provide children with:

* A comfortable, safe, and stable environment every day, year round, for all the hours that parents are at work.
* Consistent and nurturing care and education.
* The opportunity to be physically active.

* Opportunities to explore and meaningfully interact with the world around them.
* Opportunities to interact with, learn from, and be appreciated by other children.
* Stimulation and support to develop cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically in their own time and in their own ways.

Now, with a tremendous pressure and agitation for the universal preschool education in Ondo State, is the time to say, "Yes, we can and will focus every program decision on providing optimal services for our children." It is tempting to focus on the many practical and financial constraints we face today, but by concentrating on problems instead of possibilities, we will lose the vision we need to overcome the problems and make the possibilities come true.

If our goal is to educate all children, we must broaden our definition of "potential." We also must honor the full range of talent that contributes to our civility and, perhaps, to our survival. To achieve excellence in education we must confront the problems of poor children, give priority to early education, affirm the centrality of language, provide enrichment programs that reflect the changing work and family patterns of the nation, and learn more about how children learn.

As we move toward twenty first century, we must answer an urgent question: Will Nigeria continue to believe in education for all children, or will it separate 'winners' from 'losers', educate them accordingly, and in so doing become a more divided nation?

The Challenges Ahead and Conclusion

Society's view of young children, what they are like and what we want them to become, determines how we provide for their needs. It has changed over time and differs across societies. Until recently, there has been tremendous growth in understanding the needs of young children and their families in Nigeria. But the policy makers in Nigeria need to be aware of the importance and necessity of early childhood provision. There are a variety of program models available to meet the needs of the 3 to 6 year age group.

Though, there is an increased understanding of the interrelationship of children's health, socio-emotional, and cognitive needs, no appropriate programming is being implemented by either the State or Federal Governments in Nigeria to meet those needs. As in many other aspects of our lives, the more we achieve and learn, the more we see the need for greater achievement and learning. In light of this, UNICEF (1989) suggests that stimulation of preschool children through health, nutrition, psycho-motor and cognitive development activities has a significant impact on their educational attainment and overall development. It concludes that investment in these schemes has yielded such high benefits in health, nutrition, and education that early childhood development is emerging as the precursor to all other development. A major effort in this area should be a priority goal for the 1990's. Apparently, the challenges ahead are great and abundant:

1. Considering the desire for quality early childhood programs revealed in this study, there is a need to understand what resources are required.
2. Given the ability to develop and implement quality preschool programs, there is an opportunity to apply lessons learned at the preschool level to improve the quality of education provided at the primary level.
3. There is an urgent need to support the government in developing policy that will increase investment in early childhood provision; especially in making the provision more accessible to every child and in terms of viable programs.
4. As a result of the relationship between early and later learning, there is a need to be aware of the context within which programs are being developed and to develop them so there is a continuity for children from one educational level to another.
5. Considering the widespread availability of strategies for preschool provision, there is a need to more systematically analyze their validity and then to build on what is appropriate for a given culture and discard what is inappropriate.

6. Given the value of integrated efforts, there is a need to support the development of different models of integrated programming for young children and their families, and to evaluate the effectiveness of each approach.
7. As a result of the interdependence of women, there is a need to support the creation of program models that meet their needs.
8. And finally, there is a need to create pre-and inservice teacher education models that provide teachers with a theoretical understanding and a range of practical skills.

Some interviewees said that our most important challenges are a matter of focus. We must focus on how we can meet our children's needs. We must look ahead to how we can support children's development and learning throughout the early childhood years. And, finally, we must recognize the needs and resources so as to work together to create the future we all want.

Recommendations

These recommendations are based on the findings of this study and many other sources (research, literature etc.) which point to the fact that early childhood education is vital in all dimensions of a child's development. Apart from facilitating the child's cognitive dimension, it also facilitates his or her physical, social, emotional, and aesthetic abilities. It is obvious that there is an optimum period when these skills can be acquired, and that such a period is during early childhood years (Kagan, 1992). This is one of the major reasons why most interviewees strongly support the incorporation of preschool programs into the educational system in Ondo State. They also emphasize that early childhood education must be given greater attention and priority in the past.

Monau (1992) states that projects which are initiated by the community last longer than those that are government or agency sponsored. The community views at them as "ours" and not "theirs" and does not want to see their efforts fail. In addition, people are aware of what is happening in their community and to their children.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (1981) states that education is an important instrument of change in modern societies. With education, an individual or group of individuals can move towards more valued positions and rewards in society. Well paid jobs, good social services, and privileges are rare in modern societies without a satisfactory formal education. Education has also been an instrument by which individuals have moved from one stratum to another. For instance, many children whose parents were of lower class have, through education and better jobs, reached the upper class (Okeem, 1990). Schools are, like any other social institution, human organizations established to serve those establishing them. Komi maintains that "institutions are established to serve the general public, but the aims may not be realized with the general public in view." He goes further to assert that "these institutions have been, and may still be, used to serve those in the upper classes of society." All along, a child in the common school (lower-class school) lives in a less advantageous social environment which militates against his or her success in school and later in life. Whereas, the upper-class child has more stimulating situations that facilitate his or her success. The advantaged child is, so to speak, well-equipped for a gainful career after completing his or her studies (Okeem, 1990). The question is, shall we allow such schooling practices to continue, or do we abolish them? Arising from the findings of this study the following recommendations address incorporating preschool program into the public school system and the need for community active involvement.

Recommendations on Preschool Policy

The findings of this study reveal that the expansion of early childhood programs is essential in the face of today's social trends and societal needs. Successful expansion will require a delivery system that addresses curriculum design and implementation, teacher preparation, and a comprehensive process for ongoing program analysis, evaluation, and revision. These challenges can be expected to involve policy makers in extended debate,

and the accumulation of research and experience in early childhood education should be used to resolve issues and build programs of the highest possible quality.

The curriculum of present nursery schools in Ondo State does not reflect all the aims and objectives of preprimary education outlined in the National Policy on Education. Apart from this, it has been revealed and discussed in this study that the policy itself has ambiguities and, therefore, is not consistent with the purpose of quality preschool education. Thus, in the wake of an increased awareness of the need for an adequate preschool program, the national policy emerged in an effort to solve the crisis. Based on the information gathered during this study, the following recommendations might provide guidelines for assessing preschool programs and establishing policies in Ondo State:

1. The preschool policy at the State and Federal levels should recognize early childhood education as a legitimate need of different families at different times. The Federal Government should recognize preprimary education as a sector in the educational ladder. In light of this, State Governments should be encouraged to establish state nursery schools. However, private individuals may establish their own nursery schools as long as they are well supervised by the government.
2. The policy should increase accessibility of preschool services. The number of preschool programs will need to be increased as both middle-class and lower-class families compete for early childhood programs. Sufficient funds must be expended by the local, state, and federal governments. A way can be found to use such government money as a lever to encourage private, charitable, and state organizations to contribute substantial help in expanding facilities. Ways must be found to allow families from various socioeconomic levels to have access to good early childhood programs with provisions for sliding-scale fees to cover part of the cost. Public funds could be used to give preschool program access to needy families.
3. The early childhood education policy must ensure that the use of the services is voluntary. Some interviewees in this study strenuously opposed any attempt to make

specific forms of preschool program mandatory or to set down regulations that might force parents to place their children in out-of-home care and education; when in fact the program is not made absolutely free. Poor parents are especially sensitive to this issue.

4. Preschool policy may allow funds to be targeted to protect children most in need. Any plan for expenditure of funds must take into account the special needs of vulnerable children, including those who are neglected, abused, and either physically or mentally handicapped. As more middle-class families use preschool programs, children of poor families may be less able to afford these services unless steps are undertaken to safeguard their interests.
5. The preschool policy should encourage diverse early childhood program arrangements. Unless there is diversity in preschool programs, families will have limited choices as to the kind of programs their children will receive. Families that are less advantaged may not want to be assigned to a particular type of preschool program. On the other hand, many middle-class families want to be able to choose among a number of programs and determine which one meets their needs or preferences. Plans for expanding early childhood programs must recognize that there is no **'one'** preschool program that is best for all children and efforts should be directed toward providing diversity in financing, delivering, and monitoring early childhood programs.
6. The early childhood policy must include mechanisms to protect children in the program and to promote quality. The free market will not always provide high quality programs or safeguard the welfare of children. Policy and guidelines that set out minimum standards are required to protect children and to make certain that preschool organizers are providing a healthy and stimulating environment for children. As Thorman (1989, p. 103) points out: "In a seller's market, quality is sacrificed to need, price and convenience - and unlike products, children must be protected from the effects of that sacrifice."

7. The preschool policy must ensure and encourage parent and community involvement. Apparently, a preschool program cannot supplant parental care, and a strong sense of partnership between parents and preschool institutions is in the best interest of children. Involvement of parents and community in setting policy is one area in which improvement can be made to ensure parent interest in the quality of preschool program offered. Planned participation of parents and the community is another way to involve parents and the community in the preschool center's activities and enhance the relationship. The benefits of parent and community involvement can go far toward making early childhood education a rewarding experience for children, parents, and providers. Parent education should be a part of the preschool education program.
8. Early childhood education policy should also encourage community based, non-profit programs because they are likely to offer higher quality programs than commercial, proprietary facilities.
9. The policy should clearly state the responsibilities of the State Ministry of Education. This would include provision of general rules and regulations to direct the establishment, operations, and curricula. The ministry should be accountable to the Federal Ministry of Education and the people for the quality of education of young children.
10. The policy should specify the responsibilities of the Local Authority Government. This may include the provisions of guidelines for the administration and control of preprimary and primary education. The Ministry of Education is responsible for the quality control; the Nursery Education Unit is responsible for other aspects of nursery education.
11. It is imperative to include in the policy the responsibilities of the Voluntary Agency. The policy should mandate private individuals who operate nursery or primary schools to follow guidelines provided by the government. A private nursery/primary school

may be closed down if the Ministry of Education finds that the operation of such a school is not in the interest of children's educational progress.

12. In order to effectively co-ordinate the activities of preschool programs and all the agencies that may be involved the policy should establish a National Co-ordinating Committee on Nursery Education. Such a committee should advise the government on the organization and administration of programs at the village, urban, and regional levels.

As an area of governmental concern, policies relating to early childhood are still in their infancy. Apparently, problems to be solved seem complex and the choices are politically unattractive. Still, it is not difficult to see what is good for young children. Evidence from both the literature reviewed (Kostelnik et al, 1993; Spodek et al, 1991) in this study and comment from the participants indicate that preschool education is of value to the child; therefore, public funds should be made available so that all preschool children may have the opportunity to attend a preschool program. Research on the effects and quality of early childhood programs provides impetus for bringing together high quality programs for all children. The fulfillment of the above recommendations would allow preschools to attain a status equal to that of other educational programs in Ondo State. As opined by Komi, "Preschool education should be an important area of our educational system."

Conclusion

A study of what other countries are doing to develop preschool programs provides interesting and important contrasts to preschool education in Ondo State, in regard to the degree of commitment of public funds, effective regulation procedures, preschool teachers' qualifications, and program objectives. For instance, the comprehensive preschools services in Sweden, Israel, and other nations are built on the belief that all human beings have the right to a decent level of well-being as well as the belief that the nation must concern itself with the welfare of the children who will be the citizens of tomorrow.

Traditionally, the rearing and care of children has been considered a private rather than a public responsibility. Government funding and regulations are considered by many to be an unnecessary interference in matters that are best left to parents. Consequently, little effort has been made by government agencies to control the quality of preschool programs, and nothing has been provided to poor families and children. The people interviewed in this study said that there is an urgent need for the government to become actively involved in the provision of preschool programs in the state. Most interviewees believe that the lack of government support for preschool programs represents a shortsighted view of the importance of good out-of-home care and education at a time when more and more children need to be cared for by others while their parents work. It might be argued that children are cared for best in their own homes and by their own parents, but such is not the case in families that are struggling to provide food, shelter, and clothing for themselves and their family. As revealed in this study, most families in Ondo State are in need of preschool programs because of their disadvantaged social and economic position. It is reasonable to conclude that preschool programs are not a luxury, they are a central component of family and community life in a modern society, and the government can facilitate their development.

Reflections on the Study

The Research Topic

The topic of this research study emanated from many years of reflections, especially on my childhood as the first son of a peasant farmer who had no formal preschool education. The question "What could have happened had it been that I had preschool education? Could that have influenced my life more positively?" These questions and many others have come to my mind over, and over but without an answer. The only thing I hear from the "child" within me is "I wish I could relive my childhood again." At the outset of my doctoral program I did have an idea of what I wanted to investigate, but I discovered that

the more reading I did the more confused I became. Confused in the sense of having a lot of ideas come to mind. I often thought my research study could be the final solution to preschool programs in my state and the country as a whole. One thing that I love to do is to put my ideas down in black and white. Also, as I talked to my colleagues and my program advisor, they advised me to narrow my focus to a significant researchable topic. This seemed impossible. My research topic for this study evolved from my childhood experiences, my professional training and practices, the research studies I had conducted on preschool programs in Ondo State, and the related literature. I wanted to investigate how preschool education could be incorporated into the public school system so that every child in the state would have access to the program. I thought the time had come for people to speak out about what type of education they want for their young children and that their voices should be heard and documented.

The topic for this research was specific - -preprimary programs in Ondo State, and the methodology was open and allowed for evolving questions, emerging issues, and potential considerations or propositions. The fact that I chose to investigate people's views and beliefs on how preschool programs should be operated allowed me to focus on the specific topic while still reflecting on a more theoretical understanding. I did not expect to find a clear path as much as to begin to identify areas to explore. The topic lent itself to this approach. Therefore, if there were problems with the topic, they were the result of my own uncertainty.

As I embarked on my study I was convinced it would be a meaningful experience for me. I was very happy, pleased and motivated after presenting my proposal to a graduate seminar and discussing it with colleagues. Their interest and assurance did a great deal for me. They said the topic was an important area to investigate. My topic choice was also validated by comments from those I interviewed and from many others to whom I spoke. One interviewee remarked that, "I think the time has come for we parents to have a say on the educational needs of our young children." Another stated, "It is unbelievable that you

came right away from Canada to do us a service on how to better the lives of our children." No wonder several people asked if they could be informed when the report was completed. It was gratifying to discover that my study was not only a topic important to me, but to others who care about the education of young children and those in the education field as well. The eagerness with which preschool educators, parents, and administrators spoke about the topic, and the strong conviction with which they presented their views, assured me that the topic was important to them. Perhaps that was why others had difficulty focusing on the program itself; they linked preschool programs to politics, economic instability, poor leaderships and many other such things. Because I conducted my research at a time when Nigeria was going through a severe political crisis, an economic depression, and an unprecedented decline in the public education; it was perhaps very natural that I was often asked sensitive, political questions. Sometimes they wanted me to compare what is happening in Canada where I was studying with the situation in Nigeria and then draw a conclusion. I tried to evade the answers or make any comments. It was not because I did not know what to say or what was going on; but rather it was a deliberate action that I thought I had to stick to. In an ideal country, which recognizes and values the education of young children, criticizing or condemning the government would not be needed. However, this presented a dilemma for me as a researcher; because the topic had to be manageable and within the scope of this research study. It was imperative, but rather difficult, to make decisions on which aspects to include in the study. I am quite aware that the views, beliefs, and aspirations of the interviewees which I present reflect how I heard them, therefore, other readers may perceive the situation differently.

The Research Process

The research topic led naturally to an interpretivist research methodology. If I were to come to a deeper understanding of the views, beliefs, and aspirations of Ondo people, it seemed imperative that I use a methodology which allowed for an inductive analysis and a

thick description (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992). Although it was exciting to approach the study completely open to what would emerge from the fourteen participants in regard to preschool programs, it was also frightening for me to commence with so many questions unanswered. Such questions as; how long would the study continue, what exactly should I look for, or how frequently would I visit each participant? Even though I had tentative answers to some of these questions, they were continually open to inspection and possible change. I had more assurance as I searched through the related literature on qualitative research and found such statements as "themes will emerge from the data", "remain in the field until your topic is saturated", "let the themes emerge, and don't try to tie them down too soon or you may overlook important aspects of the experience" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Such served as watch words in the process of this study. It also implied that if I truly wanted to find out the views, beliefs, and aspirations of the participants, I could not predetermine how long the study would be nor could I state precisely what I was looking for as it was yet undisclosed.

Also, the case study approach to research has been used frequently in early childhood education and policy research; but the recent writings on case study and constructivist/interpretivist paradigms for research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Patton, 1990) have been tremendously helpful, though each case study is unique and the researcher must find the most appropriate way to present the findings. Spradley (1979, 1980) provided helpful guidelines for approaching the field, developing rapport, collecting and recording data, and establishing validity. These guidelines helped me get close to the participants in order to understand their experiences, beliefs, and aspirations. The approach helped me to address the first purpose of the study and provided a rich data from which I was able to develop thick descriptive portrayals of the participants' views. The approach enabled me to delve more deeply into the meaning the interviewees gave to their views, beliefs, and aspirations on the provisions of preschool programs in Ondo State. In most cases, this required looking behind what was said and for the underlying meaning. Obviously, it became my duty to understand and disclose what was not readily observable;

and to understand what was never said. Again, in doing this, sensitivity became my watch word.

Despite that the qualitative research procedures seemed uniquely appropriate for the study, it became imperative for me to be assured that my approach was credible and trustable. I asked myself these questions throughout the research process: Did the actors' meanings get into the narrative? How well is the evidence presented and marshaled? Have I been able to "triangulate" the evidence? Is there evidence from more than one epistemological source? Has it been made clear to the reader what is meant by the various assertions, and to display the evidentiary warrant for the assertions? I also asked myself whether I had addressed the issues of power and advantage, fear and pressure, belief, ideology, and voice. As I conducted the interviews, discussed the topic, and analyzed the few available documents, I became more attuned to the myriad elements involved and to the complex interactions among them. At the end of the first round of interviews, the information gathered seemed unfocused and too diffuse. Also, the amount of data to be considered seemed overwhelming, yet all potentially significant. As the data gathering and analysis progressed, I found that the interviews enabled me to keep the broader issues in mind and helped provide a background for understanding the available documents. Individual interviewees expressed their views, beliefs, and aspirations differently; sometimes with traces of similarities or at least partially dependent on their positions within the society. The research methodology allowed for these differences and enabled me to sift through them to propose some themes and issues which seemed to permeate the findings.

I came to the understanding that the interpretation portion of interpretive research has a nature that differentiates it from positivist work. For instance, interpretation occurs while work is still ongoing in the field. Part of the process I went through was the negotiation with informants on the adequacy of interpretations and representations. I discovered that the importance of the relationship between me (the researcher) and the researched cannot be understated here; it is apparently hard to get the story right unless I have the informed and

patient cooperation of the people who know the setting. Another thing I noticed in the process of this study was that each new interpretation shed light on the participants' views and beliefs and opened up further possibilities for interpretation. I found it difficult to know when to stop. Each re-reading, every new article, and each discussion resulted in my interpreting the interviewees' views, beliefs, and aspirations in a slightly new way. Even though the meaning and worth of interpretive studies lies less with the authors than with readers, it is for that reason that I see interpretive writing not just as a means of communicating my findings, but as part of my soul as an interpretive enterprise. Even though the findings on how to effectively operate preschool programs in Ondo State are not generalizable, I trust that others may find new meaning and insight on how best to operate preschool programs so that every child could benefit.

The process of writing this case report was sometimes interesting, revealing, and fulfilling, but at times it could be frustrating and tiring. However, it has increased my understanding of what it entails to be a researcher. Faced with a large number of transcripts and stories, I found it difficult to know what to put down on that sheet of blank paper. Working with all the data implied that I had to keep a large number of subtle distinctions in my head. For me the development of the descriptive category usually involved moving backwards and forwards between data and description. The writing involved continuous decision-making as I struggled with what to include and, equally important, what to consciously omit. Despite the need to provide sufficient detail which will adequately describe the participants' views on how preschool programs should operate in Ondo State so as to benefit all children, I was quite aware that to say too much might mean to say little.

Reflections on Qualitative Research in Early Childhood Education in Nigeria

Information and research studies on qualitative research in Nigeria are very limited. I do value qualitative inquiry for enabling me to arrive at some "reasonable formulations and interpretations." On the other hand, quantitative research seems to be popular among

scholars and researchers in Nigeria. However, the importance of interpretive research for early childhood education in Nigeria cannot be underestimated. Perhaps we have too often restricted ourselves to questions that can be best answered using a narrow range of quantitative methods. That is, questions concerning educational outcomes as measured by tests and measures of individual and group differences. It is rather unfortunate that those aspects of life that cannot be readily measured have been dismissed as unimportant or worse, they have been operationalized in a questionable fashion. No wonder Achen (1977), a political scientist, remarked that "to replace the unmeasurable with the unmeaningful is not progress" (p. 806). Many crucial questions are yet to be answered, or perhaps, they are yet to be asked. For instance, one crucial question that has been systematically ignored concerns the quest for meaning in what Bruner calls "the ordinary conduct of life" (1990, p. 19). How do children make sense of their lives in preschool settings and classrooms? How do parents and teachers make sense of their lives as parents and as teachers respectively?

Maybe as scholars and researchers we have measured people, but we have not listened well to them. What happens when those who have been researched look at the studies done of them and fail to see themselves in those studies? Rich (1989) was quite right when she said; "when someone with ... authority ... describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing" (p. 9). Bruner (1990) said that interpretive inquiry compels both the researcher and the researched to see themselves in a new way. At the heart of interpretive inquiry is a passion to understand the meaning that people are constructing in their everyday situated actions. That is, "actions situated in a cultural setting, and in the mutually interacting intentional states of the participants" (p. 19).

Reflections on What the Study Meant to Me As a Person and As a Researcher

I considered both my trip to Nigeria and the conduct of the study as a big eye-opener. I was able to see things from different perspectives than I used to, and I took more time to ponder over issues before making a decision. I seemed to be very different from the person I used to be. I came to the understand the role writing could play in helping me to reflect critically on what I had heard and recorded. Though, it was very uneasy for me to carry out research in Ondo State at that time, I found the whole process a most rewarding experience. Perhaps it was a mixed blessing that I conducted my research at a time when political crisis in Nigeria was at a peak, lives were unsafe, essential materials were unnecessarily expensive, and unprecedented corruption became the order of the day. Lives were unbearable. Everybody was bitter about the government and the whole system. I heard people calling on God or showing their faith and hope in God several times. People questioned whether the educational system was even working. Most people regretted and lamented the sudden eroding of moral values in our schools. To most people, moral values should be the basis of Nigerian education, and when this is absent, the whole system is bound to collapse. I heard some interviewees say, "when the foundation is weak the super-structure will be precarious." All these questions raised some fundamental issues in my mind, such as, what, why, and how is the purpose of education in Nigeria today?

I agree with Okeem that human beings have body, mind, and spirit. It is therefore imperative for our educational system to address that total "being". Our educational system from preschool to the university levels needs to cover all the basic elements of the human being- -body, mind, and spirit, or the physical, the intellectual, and the moral/emotional aspects of life. However, our educational system seems to emphasize the development of body and mind; while the spiritual aspect is neglected. Mentioning the spiritual/moral dimension often causes embarrassment. People then question "What is it? It is not scientific, is it? You better keep your morals to yourself."

My experience during the course of this research study enabled me to question "why should we offer education at all?" Should it be for the few privileged people in our society, for the many or should it be for all citizens? If education should be for the few, how exactly would they be selected? If for the many, what should be the selection mechanism and what percentage of the population would constitute the many? If it should be for all our children, what does this mean? Again and again, I asked myself what does it means in practical terms in Nigerian society where the majority of parents or guardians cannot afford one meal, let alone two square meals, every day? As I progressed with this study, I did ask myself all these questions without an absolute solution. This has raised some doubts in my mind as to the future of education in Nigeria without re-tracing our footstep back to our societal moral values. It does not seem plausible that we can achieve an egalitarian society through education, no matter how much we try. This is the reality especially when we relate the educational pattern to the occupational one.

As a researcher, even as I write this final chapter, I am left with many questions. It is hard to say that I have come to a fuller understanding of the views, values, beliefs, and future aspirations of the fourteen participants interviewed regarding preschool programs in Ondo State. Despite that I did gain insight into their views and beliefs; nevertheless, with each new understanding came further questions. Apparently, the study of human meaning can never be completely unfolded- it is inexhaustible. Therefore, it must always remain open to further interpretation. Even though I identified and chose to develop twelve themes, there might have been twelve more. I seriously look forward to being able to continue to determine the questions and to seeking increased understanding of how best we can provide preschool programs for our young children in Ondo State. Most importantly, I feel fortunate that I was able to find a study that had meaning for me. Even though I tend to be more politically inclined in my future ambition, as I write this report, I hope I am about to begin a new role in my professional life as an early childhood teacher, educator, and consultant.

Now that I have completed my investigation, I realize that this study is not an end in itself. I now ask myself, "What is the next thing to do?" Even though I could not find an absolute answer to this question now, I feel I have just begun.

Further Research Study

1. The paradox that this study raised, (i. e., the fact that some interviewees felt that preschool programs should not be mandatory and yet saw many advantages) should be investigated in more depth. The fact that this paradox exists arises from the varying perceptions people have of these programs across the state. In-depth investigation into what kind of preschool program would be relevant to development needs and the socio-cultural diversity of Nigerian society is essential.
2. An extensive questionnaire survey should be undertaken to determine opinions on whether or not preschool programs should be part of the educational system in the state and the advantages and disadvantages of this type of system. A major factor in the delivery of effective preschool programs is the teacher and the parents. These groups should be questioned as to their opinions in regard to the incorporation of early childhood education into the educational system in Ondo State.

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Appendix 1

Below are the names (the actual names have been changed) of the study participants and a brief description of them.

1. **Yetunde A. (Yetty).** Yetty is **a parent** residing in Ondo city. She has two children attending private preschool programs in Ondo city. Yetty is currently teaching at the college of education in Ondo city. She has a very good background in education and teaching profession.
2. **Elizabeth E. (Betty).** Betty is **a parent** and living in Ondo city. She has a son attending private preschool program before he withdrew to the public school. Betty is a head teacher in a public primary school in Ondo city. Apart from being a parent before, she has never being actively involved in preschool programs.
3. **Adekomi B. (Komi).** Dr. Komi is **a parent** who is actively involved in preschool programs. He is a lecturer at the college of education in Ondo city. He has a good background in educational technology and has organized series of programs for preschool teachers in Ondo State. Komi has also prepared a lot of teaching materials for schools especially preschools in Ondo State.
4. **Akinsoyinu A. (Soyinu).** Soyinu is **a teacher and a proprietor** of a private preschool in Ondo city. He is a qualified teacher but does not specialize in preschool education. He has taught at both elementary and high schools in Ondo State before establishing private nursery/primary school in Ondo city.
5. **Ayodele D. (Dele).** Dele is **a teacher** in one of the private preschools in Ondo city. Dele graduated from college of education as a National Certificate of Education teacher. Apparently he is qualified to teach in the junior high school and not preschool settings. But as a result of unemployment at that level he decided to teach science in a private nursery/primary school in Ondo city.
6. **Raphaeles J. (Raphael).** Raphael is presently **teaching part-time** in one of the private preprimary schools in Ondo city. He retired as an assistant head teacher of a

public primary school. He also works on his cocoa plantation farm to supplement his teaching job. Raphael is a Grade Two teacher and therefore qualified to teach at the elementary level. But he had a rudimentary knowledge of preschool education through workshops, seminars and self-development programs.

7. **Fasakin E. (Fasa)** Fasa is **a parent** and she is residing in Iludun-Ekiti, a rural community. By profession, she is a teacher in the only high school in this community. Fasa has a college degree in education and therefore has a very good background in education, though not necessarily preschool education. She is involved in the preschool programs as a parent.
8. **Oluwakemi B. (Kemi).** Kemi is **a parent** and presently has two of her children attending a private preschool program in Iludun-Ekiti. She teaches part-time home economic at the community high school and also engages in a petty trade. As a parent, Kemi is involved in the preschool program within her community.
9. **Olanipekun E. (Pekun).** Pekun is **a parent** with three children, two are attending private nursery school in Iludun-Ekiti while the oldest daughter is attending a public primary school in the same community. Pekun teaches at the public elementary school at Iludun-Ekiti. Apart from teaching, she also weaves traditional dresses.
10. **Omoladun E. (Adun).** Adun is presently **teaching** in the private nursery/primary school at Iludun-Ekiti, a rural community. Adun is a Grade Two teacher and therefore qualified to teach only at the elementary school. But she has some experiences in preschool education through attendance in workshops and seminars. She was a head teacher of private preschool in another rural community before she moved to Iludun-Ekiti.
11. **Josephus A. (Joseph).** Joseph is **a teacher** in a private preschool at Iludun-Ekiti. Joseph is a Grade Two teacher and because he could not secure a job in a public school, he decided to teach in a private preschool.

12. **Oluwadare A. (Dare).** Dare is presently **teaching** in a private nursery school at Iludun-Ekiti. Dare only graduated from high school a few years ago. He has no teacher education or background. He said he is currently going through on-the- job training program.

13. **Olusuyi D. (Suyi).** Suyi is the **Deputy Director of Education** in Ondo State. Suyi holds a Master's degree in education. She had attended series of workshops and inservice training to qualify her as an administrator. She was the Chief Education Officer, preprimary section for Ondo State before she was promoted to her present position. As an experienced teacher and a long time member of Ondo State Ministry of Education, she has a good knowledge of the development of preprimary institutions in the state and their current operations. Suyi has organized series of workshops, seminars and prepared teaching materials for the preschools teachers and proprietors/proprietresses in the state. She was the Chairperson of the Better Life Day Care centers in Ondo State.

14. **Shagari V. (Sarah).** Sarah is currently the **Chief Education Officer** in the preprimary section Ministry of Education, Ondo State. She has a college degree in education but not in early childhood development. Sarah has taught for many years at elementary and high school levels before she appointed as an administrator to supervise the numerous private preprimary/primary schools in the state. She is also responsible for the approval of private preschools in Ondo State as well as to formulate guidelines for the owners of these schools.

15. Traditional **Leaders (i.e. Chief Obasa and eight others).** Chief Obasa is the overall leader of the council of the traditional rulers within Iludun-Ekiti community. Each of the remaining traditional leaders (eight: six men and two women) heads different positions within the community. In term of their occupations, some of them are farmers, hunters and traditional herbalists. Chief Obasa is well educated and used to

work with Ministry of Local Government before he was appointed as a traditional leader. The traditional rulers in Ondo State are well respected, honored and feared.

Appendix 2

Procedure for Processing Applications for Opening Private Nursery/Primary Schools in Ondo State

i) The applicant Proprietor should apply for inspection of the proposed site for the school by submitting to the Preprimary Section, Ministry of Education, Akure, the originals and two photocopies of the Treasury Receipts for:

a) N25.00 (Twenty Five Naira) Application form fee,

b) N1,000.00 (One Thousand Naira) Site - Inspection fee (The original Treasury Receipts are to be returned to the applicant proprietor while a photocopy of the Site Inspection fee receipt should be forwarded - to the Area Education Officer of the applicant's Local Government Area with the appropriate directive).

ii) The applicant Proprietor will thereafter collect the application form and the Guidelines for the establishment of Private Nursery and Primary School.

iii) The application forms should be completed in duplicate and submitted, one to the Area Education Officer, and the other to Preprimary Education Section.

iv) After fulfilling all necessary conditions for the establishment and management of Nursery and primary Schools as provided for in the Guidelines, the applicant Proprietor shall apply to the Area Education Officer for site Inspection and forward a copy of the letter to Preprimary Education Section.

v) The Area Education Officer will thereafter make all necessary arrangements for the immediate inspection of the proposed school. The team of inspectors shall include the following:

a) The Area Education Officer - Team Leader

b) The Divisional Engineer, Ministry of Works and Transport - Member

c) The Principal Health Superintendent, , Ministry of Health - Member

d) The Divisional Fire Officer, Ministry of Information and Culture - Member

vi) The Area Education Officer shall collate and forward the reports of inspection of the Preprimary Education Section within two weeks of inspection.

vii) The applicant Proprietor/Proprietress shall be requested to pay the approval fee of N2,000.00 in respect of Nursery School and N4,000.00 in respect of Nursery/Primary School before further processing of application.

viii) After processing the report, the Ministry will forward the decision of the State Commissioner for Education to the applicant Proprietor through the Area Education Officer.

ix) Once a Private Nursery/Primary School is approved by the State Commissioner of Education, the School is automatically bound by the provisions of the Education Law, Cap. 36 or Laws of Ondo State of Nigeria, 1978 and therefore it is the responsibility of the Area Education Officer to visit the school regularly for quality control purposes.

1. Renewal fees for Nursery/Primary School-- N2,000.00
2. Renewal fees for Nursery/School only-- N1,000.00
3. Application for and guidelines fees-- N25.00
4. Inspection fee-- N2,000.00
5. Registration fee for Nursery only-- N2,000.00
6. Registration fee for Nursery/Primary School-- N4,000.00

Guidelines for the Establishment and Management of Nursery and Private Primary Schools in Ondo State

1. Registration

i) Approval for establishing a Private Nursery and Primary School shall be given by the Commissioner of Education.

ii) Each proprietor shall be requested to pay a once for all approval fee of N2,000.00 and annual renewal fee of N1,000.00 for Nursery alone, and N4,000.00 approval fees and annual renewal fee of N2,000.00 for Nursery/Primary.

iii) Approval for Registration shall be reviewed every three years in order to check abuse and to ensure the maintenance of good standard but this exercise will involve no payment of registration fee.

2. **Accommodation (Physical Facilities)**

A. PERMANENT SITE:

A permanent site is compulsory for operating a Private Nursery/Primary School. On no condition should a Private Primary School operate a Temporary site. The building must conform to the following requirements:

i) The building plan must be attached to the application.

ii) Standard classroom size should be 12m by 6.5m to accommodate about 25 to 30 children.

iii) Each classroom should be cross ventilated and well lit.

iv) Each classroom must have storage facilities and built-in cupboards for large and small items of equipment.

v) The classroom should have two access doorways to serve as alternative exits and a verandah on either side.

vi) There must be a separate staff room or office for the Head teacher and First Aid Units with provision for two to four beds. There must be room for future expansion.

vii) A good source of water supply should be available.

viii) There must be a well equipped library in the school.

B. TEMPORARY SITE:

Temporary site is only allowed for Nursery Schools. A bungalow in an aesthetic environment is preferable with the following facilities:

i) Enough space for children to play.

ii) Games facilities for climbing, jumping, pulling, handling, swinging, balancing and rocking.

iii) Each classroom must have storage facilities and built-in cupboards for large and small items of equipment.

iv) There must be a separate staff room or office for the H/teacher.

v) There must be a First Aid Room with two beds.

vi) There must be a good source of water supply.

vii) There must be a well equipped library in the school.

3. **Playground**

i) A well fenced-in-playground, varying in size according to the enrollment of the school must be provided, while every possible provision should be made for further expansion.

ii) The playground should be grassed and installed with adequate games facilities.

iii) A track of hard surface for pushing wheeled toys should be provided.

4. **Health Facilities**

i) A Medical Inspection Room must be provided.

ii) Food service: kitchen must be provided.

iii) Food vendor must be acceptable.

iv) Washhands basins must be adequate.

v) Water facilities must be provided.

vi) First Aid Box must be provided.

vii) Drug must be adequate

Name and Address of Medical Doctor/Nurse on call must be given.

viii) Toilet facilities must be provided for:

a) Boys

b) Girls

c) Staff

ix) The rooms for toilet must be built to specifications.

5. **Basic Fire Prevention: Safety Regulations**

Motto: "It is good to observe the rules and avoid the need for emergency measures".

1. Means of Escape in case of emergency must be provided.
2. Evacuation procedure must be provided.
3. Security: Day or Night Guards must be provided.
4. Security: Fencing of the premises must be provided.
5. Portable fire equipment must be provided.
6. Fire Equipment must be installed.
7. Means of calling Fire Brigade or Police must be provided.
8. Lighting Asbestos must be provided.
9. Traffic control must be provided, e.g. Traffic wardens must be employed to guide the children while crossing the road.
10. Rules for evacuation must be drawn up.

6. **School Records and Furniture**

A. RECORDS: The following school records must be provided:

1. Admission Register --One
2. Attendance Register --One for each class
3. Syllabus- -Approved National Preprimary Curriculum
4. Plan of Work (Weekly) --One for each class
5. Log Book --One
6. Supervision Book --One
7. Library Books --As many as possible
8. Prospectus --One
9. Visitors' Book --One
10. Time Table --One

B. FURNITURE: The following school furniture must be provided:

1. Pupils Seats' (Number) --25 to 30 per class
2. Teacher Seats' (Number) --One per class
3. Cupboards' (Number) --Two per class

7. **Staffing in Private Nursery/Primary Schools**

A. NURSERY SCHOOLS

i) **Headship:** The headteacher shall be a kindergarten teacher holding a minimum qualification of Grade II Teachers' Certificate. The possession of any of the following qualifications would however be an advantage:

a) Grade I Teachers' Certificate

b) An Associateship Diploma in Education Certificate of a recognized University with specialization in Preprimary Education

c) National Froebel Diploma

d) Montessori Diploma

e) U.K. Ministry of Education Certificate

f) N.C.E. Preprimary/Primary of any recognized University

g) B.Ed. B.A. (Educ.) with specialization in Preprimary Education

ii) **Class Teacher:** The class teacher must be a kindergarten teacher holding a minimum qualification of Grade II Teachers' Certificate. The possession of any of the following qualifications would however be an advantage:

a) Grade I Teachers' Certificate

b) An Associateship Diploma in Education Certificate of a recognized University with specialization in Preprimary Education

c) National Froebel Diploma

d) Montessori Diploma

e) U.K. Ministry of Education Certificate

f) N.C.E. Preprimary/Primary of any recognized University

g) B.Ed. B.A. (Educ.) with specialization in Preprimary Education

h) Any other qualifications in Early Childhood Education approved by the Ministry of Education

Appendix 3

Interviews Schedule for the Administrators and Preschool Teachers

Examples of Guiding Questions which could be Formulate under these Generic Headings

1) **Interviewee's knowledge about the historical events surrounding the development of preschool education in Nigeria and Ondo State, i.e.;**

a) Could you tell me what you know about the history and development of preschool education programs in Nigeria and Ondo State?

b) In your view, what were some of the major goals and objectives of preschool education?

c) Do you know of any changes in these goals and objectives? How have these changes affected the program?

2) **Interviewee's background and involvement with preprimary education programs in Ondo State.**

a) Could you tell me about your involvement with preschool education programs, for examples, when you were involved, the duration of your involvement, your role and your current involvement?

b) Do you feel you have a decision-making role in the delivery of preschool education programs in the state ? What decisions are you responsible for making?

c) During your involvement, what were some of the major events you saw in the development/changes of preprimary programs?

d) How have these development and changes affected the programs and the people involved in them?

3) **Present organization, administration and the implications for preschool operation.**

a) The National Policy on Education encourages private efforts in the provision of preprimary education. What is your knowledge about the organization of privately operated preschool institutions in the state?

b) What are your views, beliefs, and aspirations regarding the need for privately operated programs and for publicly operated preprimary schools? Who do you feel should operate preprimary programs in the state?

c) What are your views regarding mandatory preschool programs in the state?

4) **Equity and access to preschool education.** The National Policy on Education acknowledges the importance of early childhood education, and the policy was built on the national objectives or philosophy of "a just and egalitarian society."

a) Do you find any relevance with the philosophy and the actual practices of education in the state?

b) Do you feel that preschool programs should be made available for all children (poor or rich, rural and urban dweller)? If so, why and how? If not, why?

c) What do you think should be the role of government, community and parents in the provision of preschool education?

5) **Problems related to privately operated preschool institutions and the possible incorporation into the public school system. Possible shortcomings and merits if incorporated.**

a) What are the problems/and/or benefits related to privately operated preschool programs in the state?

b) What are the problems and/or benefits of publicly operated programs?

Facilities

a) How important are facilities in the delivery of preschool programs?

b) What advantages or disadvantages do you think to preschool operating in public school system in respect to the availability of facilities? In a private system?

c) Do you feel there should be class size restrictions?

Program needs

a) As a result of your involvement with preschool programs do you feel there is a need for more direction and guidelines in respect to the teaching of these programs (i. e. uniformity of teaching styles, uniform curriculum for the state, etc.)?

b) In your view, what do you consider to be the important components of a successful preschool programs?

c) If preprimary education becomes integrated as part of school system, do you feel its programs should remain autonomous in its objectives, or becomes integrated into the school curriculum? If preprimary programs are privately operated, should they remain?

Administration and Organization

a) Could you tell me what you know about the present organization and administration of preschool institutions in the state? What are the merits and demerits?

b) Do you feel the quality and coordination of preschool programs in the state is effective? If yes, how and why? If no, why?

c) How does finance affect preprimary programs?

d) How do you enhance quality control of preschool programs both in the rural and urban communities?

Children benefits

a) In your view, does a child benefit by attending preschool institution? How important is it for the child to attend?

b) What about children who do not attend a preschool program?

c) Do you feel children will benefit more from publicly operated preschools or privately operated programs? Why and how?

Equal opportunity and access

a) What are your views and beliefs on equal opportunity and access of all children to preschool programs in the state?

b) In your view, do you feel if preschool education becomes a part of the school system in the state will that influence equal opportunity and access for all children? How and why?

c) Do you believe that Ondo State Government should make the provision of preschool programs a priority or one of its educational priorities? Give reasons for your opinion?

Parent benefits

a) Could you tell me if the parents benefits who have their children in preschool program?

Teacher benefits

a) In your view, what criteria should be used when selecting/employing a preschool teacher?

b) Do you feel a preschool teacher should be an integral part of the school system? Why and why not?

c) What benefits do you feel a teacher has when teaching for a publicly operated institution? When teaching for a privately operated one?

d) If preschool education programs become a part of school system, in what direction do you see the training of early childhood specialists going? Should there still be regulations governing those who are able to teach this program?

Support staff

a) Could you tell me what type of support staff are available to all preschool programs operating in the state?

b) Do you think preschool teacher aides should have special early childhood training in order to assist in preschool programs?

c) What role do you see parents playing in the support and development of preschool programs?

d) What are your aspirations as to the roles of parents in preschool programs? How best can these be achieved?

6) **Participants' views and aspirations as to any alternatives of intervention to the present operation/delivery of preschool programs.**

a) In your view, do you think the current preschool program is meeting the needs of every child or serving its purpose according to the National Policy on Education? If yes, how? If no, why?

b) Could you suggest any alternatives or how best to operate preschool programs in the state?

Interviews Schedule for Parents

Examples of Guiding Questions which could be Formulated under these Generic Headings

1) **Interviewee's background and involvement with preprimary education programs in Ondo State.**

a) Have you been involved in any way with preschool programs in Ondo State? If yes, how and what role did you play? Are you still involved? If no, why?

b) What do you think about preschool education for children ages 3 to 5+? Do you think this is important? If yes, why? If no, give reasons?

2) **Present organization, administration and the implications for preschool operation**

a) Preschool education is privately operated throughout the state, and the families of these preschoolers pay fees, unlike the public primary schools that are free. In your view, is there a need for both privately and publicly operated preprimary schools in the state? If not, who do you feel should operate preschool programs in the state?

b) Are you satisfied with the way the preschool programs operate in the state? If yes, why? If no, why?

c) Do you feel that preschool programs should be made mandatory for all children in the state? If so, why? If not, why?

3) **Equity and excess to preschool education.**

a) Do you think that preschool programs should be made available for all children; the poor and the rich, the rural and urban dwellers? If so, why and how? If no, why?

b) What do you think should be the role of government, community and parents in the provision of preschool education in the state?

4) **Problems related to privately operated preschool institutions and the possible incorporation into the public school system. Possible short-comings and merits if incorporated.**

a) In your view, what are the problems related to privately operated preschool programs in the state?

b) Do you think preschool programs would be different if publicly operated? If yes, how would they be different? If no, why?

c) If preschool institutions in the state are publicly operated, what do you consider would be the merits and demerits?

The merits and demerits could be in the areas of;

i) **Facilities**

a) How important are facilities in the delivery of preschool programs?

b) What advantages or disadvantages do you think to preschool operating in public school system in respect to the availability of facilities?

ii) **Children benefits**

a) In your view, does a child benefit by attending preschool institution? How important is it for the child to attend?

b) What about children who do not attend a preschool program?

c) Do you feel children will benefit more from publicly operated preschools or privately operated programs? Why and how?

iii) **Equal opportunity and access.**

a) What are your views and beliefs on equal opportunity and access of all children to preschool programs in the state?

b) In your view, do you feel if preschool education becomes a part of the school system in the state will that influence equal opportunity and access for all children? If no, why? If yes, how and why?

c) Do you believe that Ondo State Government should make the provision of preschool programs a priority or one of its educational priorities ? Give reasons for your opinion?

iv) **Parent benefits**

a) Do you have any child (ren) attending/ had attended preschool programs? If yes, why? If no, why?

b) Could you tell me the benefits of parents who have their children attending preschool programs?

v) **Support staff**

a) What role do you see parents playing in the support and development of preschool programs?

b) What are your aspirations as to the roles of parents in preschool programs? How best can these be achieved?

5) **Participants' views and aspirations as to any alternatives of intervention to the present operation/delivery of preschool programs.**

a) In your view, do you think the current preschool program is meeting the needs of every child or serving its purpose according to the National Policy on Education? If yes, how? If no, why?

b) Could you suggest any alternatives or how best to operate preschool programs in the state?